

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

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NEW YORK, MAY 28, 1919.

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LIGHTNING LEW, THE BOY SCOUT; OR, PERILS IN THE WEST. *By GENL JAS. A. GORDON.*



With the quickness of thought Lightning Lew sprang upon the ruffian, tore the beard from his face, and revealed him in his true character. "Black Ben!" cried the miners.

"Ay, Black Ben, the man who drove me from home."

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By GEN'L JAS. A. GORDON

CHAPTER I.

THE SETTLER'S CABIN—AN UNWELCOME GUEST—A STORM BREWING.

"Now, then, Mary, child, help me get supper; it is growing late, and if Lew returns he will want something to eat."

"Do you think he will be at home to-night, mother?"

"It is very likely, for he has been away for three days, and he never stays longer."

A handsome, middle-aged woman and a girl of eighteen were the speakers, the place being a rough but comfortable frame house on the outskirts of a mining camp in California.

The house was built of great logs placed together, and the chinks filled with plaster, and contained three rooms on the lower floor, besides an ell room used as a pantry, and two on the floor above, but within everything was as cozy and bright as one could wish, an air of comfort pervading it which would not have been expected from the rough exterior.

There was a great fireplace at one side, where a huge log, resting on bright fire-logs, snapped and crackled and gave forth a cheerful heat, as well as light, while above, on a broad stone shelf, were the few simple ornaments which betokened the presence of women, and added color to the picture.

In a corner stood a dresser where the dishes were arranged in rows on the shelves, a vase filled with wild flowers standing on the ledge, and a bright shawl thrown carelessly over one corner.

A tall, solemn-looking clock ticked monotonously in an angle formed by two of the walls, and opposite was a short flight of steps leading to a door, and thence again to the floor above.

A neat rag carpet occupied the center of the floor, and on it stood a plain deal table which Mary now proceeded to set for supper.

Col. Valleo, the owner of the place, had settled in California during the early days of the gold excitement, and owned a considerable tract of rich land on the side of a canyon which he had acquired by Spanish grant, but, although rich in land, he was sometimes at considerable trouble to obtain ready money when he needed it.

Their cows and hens furnished them with milk and eggs, and in the garden back of the house they could raise vegetables, while the rifle of young Lew, Mrs. Valleo's son, often procured them dainties from the mountains or woods.

Ready money was sometimes hard to obtain, however, although Col. Valleo hoped to overcome his trouble by the sale of a part of his land, the mining camp near them promising to develop into a town some day when men would flock hither from all parts, and a flourishing settlement grow around them.

As Mary spread a clean white cloth upon the table there was heard the distant roll of thunder echoing and re-echoing among the hills.

"I wish Lew would come," muttered Mrs. Valleo, who had just come in from the kitchen. "I fear that we will have a storm, and besides——"

"What is the matter, mother?" asked the young girl, as she noticed a look of anxiety on the elder woman's face.

"Nothing, child, nothing," said Mrs. Valleo, placing a dish on the table. "Storms among the mountains are not pleasant things to be caught out in, as you know."

"Yes, but you said 'besides,' and then stopped. You were thinking of something more to be dreaded than storms. What was it, mother?"

"Nothing, nothing, it was only a fancy," returned Mrs. Valleo, half petulantly. "I really don't know what I was thinking about."

At that moment the sound of distant thunder was again heard, louder than before, and at the same moment a hoarse voice cried outside:

"Halloo there, the house! Are you all asleep or dead?"

"That voice!" gasped Mrs. Valleo, on her way to the kitchen.

Mary did not hear the exclamation, for in her sudden fright she had dropped a plate, which fell to the floor with a clatter and broke in pieces.

"Don't be so careless, child," said Mrs. Valleo, recovering her own composure. "Go and see who is outside."

At that moment a man, past middle age, with long, silvery, gray hair and beard, entered the living room from one of the bedrooms, and said:

"Get a light, Mary, and stir up the fire. Lew has come home."

"No, father, it is not Lew," said the girl, lighting a candle and placing it on the table, the room having grown suddenly dark.

There came a loud knock at the door leading outside, answered by the barking of a dog.

"Come in!" called Col. Valleo, and two men entered.

One was a stout, middle-aged man, dressed in half miner, half farmer garb, with a broad red face and grizzled beard, while the other was dressed with more pretension, and had a smooth face, not a common thing among the men of California in the early sixties.

Mary Valleo's gaze seemed riveted upon the stranger's face, the other man she knew, and she felt a strange thrill such as she had never experienced before.

Mrs. Valleo turned pale for an instant, but she bent quickly over the fire, raking up the embers and causing a more ruddy glow to shoot forth.

"Good-evenin', cunnel," said the big man. "I was passin' an' come in. This is a friend o' mine what's come here on business."

"Good-evening, Mr. Otten—good-evening, stranger!" said the colonel, cordially. "Sit down, gentlemen. Supper will be ready in a few minutes. Mother, put on extra plates for Mr. Otten and Mr.—Mr.—I beg pardon?"

"Black is my name," said the stranger—"Benjamin Black."

I come from the northern part of the State. I fancy I have seen your wife before, Colonel Valleo—in the East, maybe."

"Never," said Mrs. Valleo, quietly, as she left the fire and crossed to the dresser.

"No?" said Ben Black, carelessly. "I had an idea we had met, but it's of no consequence."

"Cunnel," said Mr. Otten, "I come to see you on a leetle matter of business. Mr. Black here holds a note of mine for three hundred dollars, but he's willin' to gimme a extension o' time if I can give him a good indorser, so if you'll just put your name to that——"

"Father! Colonel Valleo, you will not do this?" cried Mrs. Valleo, suddenly coming forward. "You will not break the rule you have always kept to?"

Otten looked chagrined, but Ben Black's face grew dark, and an angry light came into his eyes.

"I have made it a rule never to indorse anyone's notes," said the colonel. "I am very sorry, neighbor Otten, but——"

"Waal, mebbly you can lend me the money, cunnel? That'll do just as well, and I can take up the note and let Mr. Black go?"

"I am very sorry, Mr. Otten, but I really have not as much as three hundred dollars in the house at present. Ready money is a scarce article."

"I shall have it myself in ten days," muttered Otten, "but Mr. Black has business up in Yreka; he's sheriff there, and can't stop. The note's due now, and over, but he'll gimme an extension if I give him a good man's name on the back of it. Otherwise I'll be sold up and lose all I got."

"Colonel, remember your promise," said Mrs. Valleo, as her husband seemed about to waver.

"I don't know what you got against me, Mrs. Valleo, muttered Otten. "I ain't goin' ter run away an' ruin the cunnel, and he's wuth a heap sight more'n three hundred dollars. I'm wuth it myself, but just now I'm broke, and as it's on'y to obleege a friend, I don't see——"

"I do not distrust you in the least, Mr. Otten," said Mrs. Valleo, with a glance of defiance at the stranger. "Gentlemen, will you draw up your chairs? Mary, child, bring in the supper."

"Then you do distrust me, madam?" asked Ben Black, with a laugh and an angry look.

"I have nothing to say," said the settler's wife, "beyond disapproving of my husband's putting his name to any paper which you have to do with."

"Why, mother, that is not courteous, not hospitable," said the colonel, rising. "You must apologize to our guest."

"That I will never do," said the woman.

Mary at this moment put a steaming dish of meat and some baked potatoes on the table and then stood looking fixedly at the stranger, who had scarcely more than glanced at her since his arrival.

"You will not!" muttered the colonel. "You must; I command you."

"I will never apologize to that man for what I have said," returned Mrs. Valleo. "I did not ask him here, and I never wish to see his face again."

"Awakens old memories and unpleasant ones, doesn't it, Mrs. Valleo?" asked the other with a coarse laugh. "I told you that your wife and I had met before, colonel, but perhaps it is as well to say nothing about that. She never told you much about her past life, did she?"

Mrs. Valleo looked pale, yet defiant, the colonel seemed distracted, and Ben Black wore an air of triumph.

Before the colonel could answer, or another word be said, there was a loud hallo from outside, and a step was heard at the door.

"That's Lew!" cried Mary. "Oh, I'm so glad he has come at last!"

CHAPTER II.

LEW AND HIS FRIEND—THE STORM BREAKS.

The door was thrown open as by a gust of wind, and a tall, handsome young fellow with clustering curls reaching to his shoulders, a broad sombrero on the back of his head, and a rifle in his hand, burst into the room.

He wore a blue woolen hunting-shirt, dark trousers, a broad leather belt, and boots which reached to his knee, and over his shoulder was slung a plump game-bag.

"How are you, Mary? How do, mother? Good-evening, father. Good-evening, stranger!" he cried, glancing around the room. "Why, sis, I've only been gone three days, and yet you're looking prettier than ever. Give me a kiss."

"I am so glad you have returned, Lew," said Mrs. Valleo. "I feared that something had happened. Sit down and have supper. You must be famished."

"Famished!" laughed the young fellow, putting his rifle in a corner and hanging his hat on a peg. "I don't know what that is exactly, but I'm as hungry as a b'ar or an owl."

"This is Mr. Black, Lew," said the colonel, as they all drew up to the table, the threatened trouble having been banished by the boy's sudden arrival.

"Good-evening, stranger," said Lew, casting a quick glance at Ben Black's face, and finding little to please him therein.

Intuitively he distrusted and disliked the man, but until he knew more about him would say nothing.

"Likely boy that of yours, colonel," said Ben Black, as the supper began. "He is yours, I s'pose! Looks more like the mother, though."

"He is Mrs. Valleo's child by her first marriage," answered the colonel. "Mary is my child."

"Yes, yes, and a girl to be proud of. I suppose there's no doubt about his being——"

That Ben Black was about to say something to awaken unpleasant memories was evident by the set expression on Mrs. Valleo's face, but at that moment a loud hail was heard from without.

"B'ars and catamounts, if I didn't plumb forget the Irishman!" cried Lew, jumping up. "Wait a moment!"

Throwing the door open and revealing the black and threatening night, Lew called out:

"Halloo!"

"Halloo, yersilf!" came the answer in a rich brogue. "Where are yez? Sure, I'm kilt entirely from nearly fallin' down the canyon."

"This way, Dan," and Lew seized a candle from the ledge over the fireplace and held it above his head.

"It's a wild Irishman I met down at t'other end o' the canyon," explained the boy. "He's had a tough time of it; lost nearly all he had, and it's a wonder the Injuns left him anything."

"Indians!" gasped Mrs. Valleo.

"Yes; there was three or four of 'em about to do fur him, but I popped my rifle to my shoulder, knocked one of 'em over, and the rest skinned out."

"Indians," mused Col. Valleo. "I did not know that any were about."

"Heard tell down to the fort that they was goin' on the warpath," said Lew, "but them four are all I see."

"Hallo!" came from the darkness.

"Hallo, you, Irish. Can't you find your way?"

"Begob, I couldn't if ye hadn't showed the light," was the answer.

At the next moment a tall, good-natured looking Irishman with a very red face and redder head, came in.

He wore a long coat of frieze, which reached nearly to his heels, stout boots, rough trousers, a flowered waistcoat, and a broad-brimmed hat, beneath which his ruddy face beaming with good nature, shone like a fire at the mouth of a cave.

"Good-avenin' all," he said. "It's glad I am to see frinds wanst more, for sorry's the day that I ever crossed the say, and sorrier whin I come to Californy, and faix, it's Dan Rafferty himself that would go back the day if he wor in sight of a ship."

"You have been unfortunate?" asked Colonel Valleo.

"Begorrah, I've had nothin' but bad luck from the time I left ould Ireland," muttered Dan, seating himself on a stool.

"I had two hundred pounds left me be an uncle, and they tould me that America was the place to double it."

"Yes! And so you came here?"

"I did, worse luck, me and me wife and me son Danny, the only wan left out of siven as foine boys and girruls as ye'd see in a day's walk."

"Well, comin' over on the ship me wife took sick and died, and they buried her in the wather, where I niver thought to put anny wan belonging to me."

"Then when I got to New York they tould me to go to Californy, and that's where I'd make money hand over fisht, and so I bought a wagon and two oxen, and started."

"Me luck got worse and worse the farther I wint, and at last me poor little Danny died, and I buried him in the woods, thinking it the saddest day that iver shone on me."

"Here I am now, me money all gone, me oxen dead, me wagon broken, and me goods stolen away be thim haythins av Injines, and troth I wish I wor dead mesilf this minute."

"Don't get down-hearted, stranger," said Ben Black. "You may be down on your luck now, but you'll be up again. Shake hands."

The Irishman looked up, gave Ben Black a searching glance, thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his long coat, and said:

"Every dog shakes his own paw, me man, and let you shake yours, and shake yerself out of my company, for I don't like the looks of ye."

Lew smiled, Otten laughed, and Ben Black said contemptuously:

"Do you know why the Indians did not burn you at the stake when they had you?"

"I do not, faith."

"Cause you're too green to burn, that why," laughed the other. "Bah! you ain't worth powder, you ain't."

"Maybe not, me man," said Dan, "and talkin' about Injines, you'd be safe among them, and do ye know for why?"

Ben Black merely gave a scornful look at the Irishman, who went on:

"Because ye're not born to be burned in this world, that's why, and we're meant for the rope, not the fire, me man. Maybe I'm not so green as I look."

"Oh, you go to the devil!" growled Ben Black.

"Come, come, Dan, never mind him, but have some supper," said Lew. "Don't be discouraged, old pard. You may strike it rich yet."

While Mary and Mrs. Valleo were setting something hot before Dan and Lew, the colonel, Mr. Otten, and Ben Black went into another room unobserved.

"Mother," said Mary presently, looking around, "the stranger has gone."

"I shall be glad never to see him again," said Mrs. Valleo. "I do not like his looks, and I fear him."

"He said he knew you," continued Mary.

"He is mistaken," said the other, coldly.

"Who is this man, mother?" asked Lew, looking up. "I do not like his looks; he has an evil face. Where does he come from and what does he want?"

"He means mischief," murmured Mrs. Valleo, and at that moment the door of the inner room opened.

"Very well, you will find it satisfactory, I hope, Mr. Black," said the colonel, coming out.

Ben Black had a strip of paper in his hands, which he now folded and put in his pocket.

"Much obleeged, cunnel," said Otten, "and as fur as the money goes you needn't be frightened, for I'll have more'n enough to settle with Mr. Black long afore the note comes due."

"Husband! what have you done?" cried Mrs. Valleo, hurrying forward. "You have not indorsed that note?"

"Women don't understand anything about business," retorted Col. Valleo, shortly.

"You have broken your promise," wailed the poor woman. "I tell you that that man means to ruin you. Why have you not kept your word? You promised me that you would never sign your name to anyone's notes."

"Has Mrs. Valleo always kept her word?" laughed Ben Black.

Lew was upon his feet in an instant, and with flashing eyes and clenched fists cried angrily:

"How dare you speak like that to my mother, you hound? Take back your words this moment, or I'll brain you."

"I've nothing to say to you, brat!" returned Ben Black. "Your bother owes me an apology, and I will not go till she gives it to me."

"Owes you an apology!" cried Lew. "Why, you are not fit to breathe the same air with her, you dog."

"Ha, ha, you do well to defend her," laughed the other, scornfully, "but you would not do it, if you knew all that I know. It will be a good thing for Colonel Valleo were he to turn her from his door."

Lew grasped the hilt of his hunting-knife, but Mary held him back.

"Leave this house!" he thundered.

"Not for you, my young sprig!" returned Ben Black. "Colonel Valleo, do you allow your guests to be thus insulted?"

"Insulted!" hissed Lew.

"Silence, boy!" cried the colonel. "Madam, you have lied to me!" turning upon his wife. "You told me that your husband was dead when you came here that stormy night twelve years ago."

"As God is my judge, I told the truth!" cried the poor woman.

"It is a lie! You had no husband, and your son is——"

"Silence! You shall not speak!" cried Lew. "My mother

is an angel, and I will not hear a word said against her, Colonel Valleo."

The colonel seemed like a man beside himself.

"Who are you that defies me?" he roared. "You have not even a name. Go! This house is no longer your home!"

"My God! Speak, mother," moaned the boy. "Am I your son?"

"Yes; and your father was a good man and my husband; I swear it."

"Go!" thundered Colonel Valleo, in a rage.

Lew picked up his hat and rifle, and strode to the door, as a gust of wind more violent than any that had yet been felt dashed it wide open, extinguishing the lights.

The storm had at this moment broken in full fury.

As the boy stood in the open doorway a blinding flash of lightning illumined the heavens, throwing his form into bold relief.

"Do you see that flash?" he cried. "It shall give me a name till God in his justice gives me one that I can be proud of. The name of Valleo I renounce! Henceforth I am Lightning Lew!"

In another moment he was gone.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE WOODS—THE CAVE—DAN'S FRIGHT—LEW'S RESOLVE.

"Hallo! hallo!"

"Hallo!"

"Hould an; don't run so fast."

"Is that you, Dan?"

"Sure, it's no one ilse, but it wud be nobody, if I had to run much further. I'm nearly dead."

"Come on; there's a shelter not far from here where we can be secure from the storm."

"Faith, it's a strange bye ye air entirely, Lew, to be showin' me a shelter. How do I know ye won't run away from it like ye did the cabin beyant?"

"No, Dan; the place I am taking you belongs all to me, and no one can turn me out."

"Troth, I'm sorry now ye didn't ram the lies down Mr. Ben Black's dirty throat. I didn't like him the minute I set eyes on him, and I like him still less now that I don't see him."

"Never mind him, Dan, but follow me. We are not far away now."

"Begob, ye must have the eyes of a cat to see anything in this darkness. I'd have fallen down the cannon a dozen times but for ye. Do they often shoot it off?"

"Shoot what off?"

"The cannon. Ye tould me ye met me in wan, but I saw nothing but a gully."

"Oh, come on, Irish," laughed the boy. "You're too green for me."

"Faix, if green means wet, it's thrue enough for ye, for I'm that soaked wid the rain that I wouldn't burrun if I wor in the midst av flames."

When Lightning Lew had rushed from the house of Col. Valleo, Dan had followed in hot haste, having no desire to remain where the boy was not welcome.

Having at last overtaken his young friend, the emigrant declared that he would never leave him, and swore to assist him to the extent of his power.

The storm was still raging, the rain pouring down, the lightning flashing, the thunder roaring, the wind sweeping furiously down the passes, but, unheeding all this, the boy pushed on as though a part of the tempest himself.

"This way," he cried, suddenly, taking the Irishman's hand and leading the way through the blackest darkness.

"Begorra, I can't see me hand in front av me," muttered Dan. "Phwere are we goin' anyhow? Is it the bottomless pit ye're takin' me to, I don't know?"

"Eh!" said the boy, suddenly pausing and releasing Dan's hand.

A hoarse growl was heard, and poor Dan trembled as he beheld two globes of fire shining from out the darkness directly in front of him.

Suddenly he heard a deafening report, and it seemed as though he would be overwhelmed, there was such a commotion.

"Oh, murder! Phwat has happened intoirely?" he gasped. "If ye're kilt say so, and I'll get out."

"No, I'm not dead, Dan," laughed Lew, lightly, but I reckon the b'ar or the coyote is. Wait till I strike a light."

"Strike a light is it, and all this rain pourin' down? It's daft ye are."

"Rain? There isn't any rain here, Dan. We're at home now."

There was a click, a sudden flash of light, and then the Irishman saw the boy standing before him with a bunch of blazing tow in his hand.

"Oh, murder, the bye is on fire! Well, well, I never thought ye wor the devil or wan of his imps."

Lew blew upon the tow till it was alight, and then dropped it upon a mass of dried leaves in one corner of what Dan now perceived to be a cavern, and presently a cheerful fire was blazing away, wood being added by the young hunter.

"Thar, we're as snug as a bug in a rug, Irish," laughed Lew, placing his rifle against the wall, "and now let's have a look at the b'ar, for that's what it is, sartin."

"Oh, murder! an' did ye kill that big baste wid one crack av that little pop-gun of yours?" cried Dan, gazing in surprise at the body of a big black bear that lay on the floor of the cavern.

"Right you are, stranger, and that's what he gets fur comin' to my house. Reckon the storm drove him in here, and gave me a supper besides."

"Well, well, there's hospitality for ye," sighed Dan, as he seated himself on a boulder, "but then, I suppose ye have more right to the place forbye that big brute, and if ye hadn't killed him he might have done the same for ye. And this is phwat ye call yer home, is it? Well, it's comfortable if it's not commojious, as Micky Burns said when they put him in his grave."

"It's all my own, Dan, and no one can drive me out, not even the b'ars," said Lew, "and now I reckon I'll get some sleep, for I'm plumb tired out."

"Sleep, is it?" muttered Dan, as Lew stretched himself out upon the hard floor with a stone for a pillow. "Begorry, I couldn't sleep here if I wor dead. How do ye know that some wild baste or caterwaulin' Injun won't be walkin' in on ye before mornin'?"

"Oh, they won't, Irish. I've shut the door, and they can't get in."

"Shut the dure, is it? Oh, worra! the bye is clean gone off his head! Sure, there's niver a dure here, at all."

Lew laughed heartily, and then said:

"There's a rock rolled up again the openin', stranger, that no ten men can roll away from outside, but a baby can push it back in here. I discovered the place by chance, and it's been a handy hidin' place for me the last three years when I've been out huntin' and the storm overtook me."

"Faix, it's a wonderful bye ye are entirely, and I think I'll go to slape meself. Where is me bed?"

"Same as mine, Dan, on the floor," laughed Lew. "Don't need no shakin' up nor airin', and never creaks."

"No, begorry, but my bones will creak, I'm thinkin', be lyin' on the hard stones like that. If I had a few pebbles to roll under me it might be asier."

However, a lot of leaves with his big coat laid on top made as comfortable a bed as he desired, and Dan was soon sound asleep and snoring, the fire casting a glow over his ruddy face. Good-natured even in sleep, while without the storm howled and raved, and even the wild beasts sought shelter.

Dan awoke to find the fire out and the sun shining in at the entrance of the cavern, but upon looking around he could see nothing of his boy friend.

"I wondher phwat's took him away?" he muttered, getting up. "Faix, it's not such a bad bed I've had afther all, barrin' that I'm a bit stiff in me legs. Hallo, Lew! phwere are ye at all?"

There was no answer, and Dan, following the light, walked to the entrance and then outside, finding himself in a ravine, the sun glancing down through rifts in the trees upon the soft grass at his feet.

The storm had ceased, and all was bright and beautiful, an air of calm peacefulness resting upon the scene in strong contrast to the storm and tumult of a few hours previous.

"Where has he got to, anyhow?" muttered Dan, taking a few steps and looking about him.

There was a sudden growl, almost at his feet, it seemed, and then he saw a big black bear rushing straight at him.

"Oh, murder! I'll be kilt, so I will!" he cried, with a yell of terror, as he took to his heels, never heeding which way he went.

There was another roar, and, casting a hurried glance over his shoulder, the poor fellow saw that the bear was gaining upon him, and that, instead of retreating to the cave, he had taken the oppositedirection and was in the open air.

"Oh, glory! is there no tree I can climb up? It's kilt and eaten I'll be before the bye comes to me rescue."

There was a small tree not far away, and toward this Dan now ran with all his speed.

He reached it, and in a moment was scrambling up it, a short limb projecting from the trunk ten feet from the ground, offering him a resting place.

Reaching this and looking down he beheld a strange transformation.

Standing upon its hind legs, the bear suddenly threw back its head, and then dropped its skin on the ground, and the laughing face of Lightning Lew was revealed.

"Got yer that time, Irish," chuckled the boy. "Thought I was a b'ar, didn't yer? That's one on you!"

"Oh, glory! phwat a turn ye gav' me!" laughed Dan, his ruddy face fairly shining. "Faix, it's a rare joker ye air, me bye, but yer give me a scare for wan while that I didn't know if I wor alive or dead."

"Come down, Dan," laughed Lew, "and we'll have breakfast. I've been up, skinned and dressed the b'ar, made a fire, roasted a big hunk o' meat and had everything ready these two hours."

"Sure, and what o'clock is it then? Yer must have got up in the middle of the night."

"No, I didn't; I got out at sunrise, and it's now 'bout the middle o' the afternoon."

"I'll see av yez air correct, me buck," said Dan, taking a big silver watch from his waistcoat pocket. "I have me own timepiece wid me, brought over from Ireland, and now I'll see if ye can tell the time or not. Oh, glory, so ye can! It's half after tin, so it is. Is it a witch ye are."

"Oh, boys that live in the woods an' mountains don't have no need o' clocks," answered Lew. "They have God's clocks—the sun and stars, the moon, the birds and flowers, all nature, if they'll only study it."

"Begorry, bye, ye're a jool, and whin I'm wid ye I need niver be late to dinner, for ye can tell the time to a minute. What are yer goin' to do whin ye lave here?"

"Go down to the fort and offer my services as a scout. I know this whole country like a book, and if you want a good guide or hunter, call on Lightning Lew."

CHAPTER IV.

BEN BLACK'S SCHEMES.

The morning was bright and beautiful, and no trace of the storm of the previous night could be seen around the settler's dwelling.

Mary Valleo, in a soft clinging dress, a sunbonnet pushed back from her forehead, and a light switch in her hand, passed down the little lane driving the cows to pasture.

The patient animals moved slowly along, pausing now and then to crop the tender, dew-sprinkled grass, prancing when the girl caught up to them, and stopping again when she fell behind.

Reaching the fence she took down the bars and then, as the cows passed on into the pasture lot, stood leaning against the moss-grown post gazing absently toward the woods.

The snapping of a twig, followed by a low whistle, caused the girl to look up, and she saw Ben Black approaching.

"You are prompt," he said, with a half sneer. "I expected you, but not so soon."

"Oh, Mr. Black," said Mary, with a sigh, "dreadful things have happened since last night."

"Has your half-brother returned?" asked Black, while a shade of disappointment flitted across his face.

"No. I wish he had. Father is terribly angry with mother, and will not speak to her. What have you done? It was you who brought about this quarrel. Why did you do so, Mr. Black?"

"Do you call me Mr. Black," said the other. "Call me by a less formal title. I sent for you, Mary, because I have much to tell you, because I love you."

Ben Black caught the girl in his arms, drew her toward him, and kissed her fair forehead, while a thrill swept through her entire being, and a glad cry arose to her lips.

From the first she loved this man, in spite of reason, in spite of her ignorance concerning him, in spite of herself.

"Oh, Ben!" she sighed, resting her head upon his shoulder. "It is all so strange, so new. Why, we only saw each other for the first time last night."

"No, Mary, I have seen you often, but you did not know it, and, from the first I have loved you and desired to make you my wife."

The girl released herself and said, slowly:

"You drove my brother from home and you have made my father very angry with mother. Why did you do that if you loved me? Oh, Ben, Ben, I love you, but these questions will come!"

"Your brother, as you call him, is a wild fellow, and unworthy of your love, and Mrs. Valleo has been my life-long enemy."

"My mother your enemy?"

"Yes, and what I have done is but the punishment for the evil she did to the one I loved."

"What do you mean?"

"Your mother, as you call her, was the cause of my father's ruin and disgrace," answered Black, "and not until I pay back the debt I owe her will my hate cease."

Mary uttered a cry of surprise and fell back a step, looking earnestly into the face of the man before her.

She believed him, in her trust and love, and relied implicitly on all he said.

"Years ago," continued Ben Black, fixing his eyes upon the girl's face to note the effect of his narrative, "my father was a suitor for her hand. She lured him on until, like a child that becomes tired of a plaything, she cast him adrift."

Mary shuddered and covered her face with her hands, while Black, with an evil smile unnoticed by the girl, proceeded:

"He had squandered upon her the hard-earned savings of twelve long, weary years, and when this was gone she cast him off like a worn-out glove."

"No, no. I cannot believe it," cried Mary, her slight form quivering.

"It is the truth!" muttered Black. "She deserted him upon the very eve of their marriage, and fled with another. Two years of bitterness passed for all that time my poor father looked in vain for her return."

"And then?"

"She came back with her husband and laughed at his anguish. For the agony of mind and heart that she caused him I shall repay her a hundred——"

"No, no, you must not. I have learned to love her as a mother," cried Mary, impetuously. "Forgive her, Ben, for my sake."

"For you I might, Mary, but only for you," said Black, and then, as the sound of a horn was heard in the distance, he suddenly released the girl and sprang into the road.

"I must go, Mary," he said, "but we shall meet again. Promise me that."

"Yes, I promise," said Mary, with a deep blush.

The man was gone at the next moment, and Mary put up the bars and returned to the house, singing blithely.

"All works well," laughed Black, as he strode rapidly away in the direction of the turnpike. "In three months this farm shall be mine. The old woman nearly upset my plans last night, but now, with Mary on my side and the old man's signature safe in my pocket, I can defy her. Ha! that was a pretty story I told, and the fool of a girl believed it all. Well, all's fair in love and war, and this is war indeed."

"It's lucky for me that this boy is out of the way, too, for he's worse than a mountain wolf to tackle when he gets his mad up. Ha! he can't help things any now, and all I have to do is to wait till the time comes and the farm is mine."

Reaching the road, Ben Black saw the stage coach approaching, and stood waiting till it came up.

"Hold up, driver; I'm going with you!" cried Black, holding up his hand as the coach reached the little rise where he stood.

"Pleasant day, driver," said Ben Black, as he clambered to a seat on top.

"Yaas, I ain't no fault to find with the weather," retorted Vet, significantly, "but bad weather ain't the wust thing we stage drivers has got to put up with."

"Road agents are worse, I suppose?" said Black, with a laugh.

"Yaas, I reckon so, but that ain't what I was thinkin' on. I had mostly in mind fellers that comes when yer don't want 'em, and sticks their noses into affairs what don't consarn 'em."

"Meaning me, I suppose?" said Ben Black, with an angry look.

"Waal, stranger, if the shoe fits yer I ain't tellin' yer not to put it on," returned Vet.

"I'll trouble you to keep your opinions to yourself, you meddlesome old woman," said Ben Black.

"Never did have no opinions of yer, nohow," laughed Vet, "and as I hain't mentioned no names, I don't see what call you're got to git riled. Get along there!" and Vet cracked his long whip, and the horses dashed along, thus putting an end to further conversation.

Ben Black left the stage at the end of twenty miles, and, after it had passed, left the little settlement where he had been dropped down, and jumped at once into the bush.

"That old fool came nearer to the mark than he knew," muttered the man, "but I can soon silence all such as him when my plans are ripe. I wonder if Valleo really knows the value of that tract? He mustn't find out till I get hold of it. The girl loves me, too, and that may prove awkward if I think of living on the place. If I must marry her I suppose I must, but if I didn't think it would help my schemes I wouldn't think of it."

Presently, seeing a wreath of smoke in the distance, he went forward more carefully, and soon saw Dan Rafferty cross before him with a pail of water in his hand.

"So, so; young Lew and the Irishman are camping near here, are they?" he mused. "If that boy and I meet, there'll be trouble, and I ain't ready for that yet, so I'll strike another trail."

CHAPTER V.

AN UNFORTUNATE INTERRUPTION.

"Now, then, Irish, do you think you can find your way to the place where you left your wagon?"

"Faix, I know I can't; and, besides, there'll be four hundred Injines at every turn."

"Oh, no, not so many as that, Dan. You might find ten, possibly."

"Oh, wurra! I don't want to go thin. One Injine is enough, and too much. I think I'll stay home and kape house, and let ye go."

"Then they'll come here and catch you instead, Dan."

"Oh, glory! Wheriver shall I go, thin, if there's Injines all over the country?"

"Never mind, Dan; I was only fooling. There are no Indians near us, and you are safe enough."

Lightning Lew and Dan Rafferty had made their camp in a little opening fully ten miles from where they had spent the night, and it was here in the early afternoon that Ben Black had discovered them.

"If you go to the spring yonder and fetch some water I'll go and find the wagon," said Lew, when Dan had been assured of the perfect safety of the camp.

Dan agreed, and Lew went away, returning in the course of an hour with two or three bright tin pans.

"I found these in the wagon," he remarked. "They were just what I wanted."

"For why do ye want the pans?" asked Dan, in surprise. "Sure, I thought that whin ye camped out ye ate wid yer fingers, and disposed wid plates entirely."

"We are not going to eat with these," said Lew, with a laugh. "You'll find out what I want them for some day."

"Then I'll not ax ye till ye get ready to tell me," laughed Dan.

"Come with me and maybe you'll find out now," added Lew, as he picked up the pans and started off upstream.

He paused a few times, and seemed to be examining the sand of the little stream they were following, now and then shaking his head and then going on.

Finally, after going three or four miles, he stopped at a place where the stream spread itself out in a broad, shallow basin, the water being scarcely a foot deep, and rippling over a bed of sand.

Wading out to the middle of this basin Lew dipped one of the pans to the bottom, and brought it up half full of sand and water.

Walking back to the bank he told his comrade to bring another pan and get it half full of water, but no sand.

"What are yez doin' anyhow?" asked Dan, obeying. "Have yez lost annything in the river?"

"Hold that pan of yours under mine," said Lew. "Don't let any of the sand run out, but the water may if it likes."

Then the boy began pouring the sand and water from his pan into that held by the Irishman, the latter looking on in wonder.

"I didn't see nothing but some shiny sand," he said, when Lew had emptied his pan. "What was it ye lost?"

"Nothing. I am trying to find something."

"Begorry, then, yez must have lost it if ye're thrying to find it," answered Dan. "If ye didn't lose it how would ye know what to look for?"

"Hold on! don't throw that sand away!" cried Lew, as Dan was about to empty the pan in the stream. "Empty it in my pan."

Dan did as he was requested, but, much to his surprise, Lew let much of the sand escape.

"Begorry, now ye're lettin' it get away yerself," he protested. "Can't ye be more careful?"

"Never mind, Dan, we don't want it all, but don't pour it into anything but this pan."

After several washings Lew found in the bottom of the pan half a handful of the bright sand that Dan had noticed.

"Oho, it's the yaller kind that ye wanted?" exclaimed Dan.

"Yes. Do you know what that yellow sand is?"

"Sure, it's sand the sun has shone on, faix."

"Well, the sun will shine on us if we get enough of it, Dan. It is gold."

Taking another pan, Lew dipped up more of the sand, and, after washing it several times, obtained even a larger quantity of gold dust than before.

"Our fortunes are made, Dan," he cried. "We ought to get enough out of this stream to start us and then we'll put in machinery."

"And don't they dig for gold, me bye?" asked Dan.

"Certainly, and wash for it, too. This yer is called placer mining. Now and again they come on a nugget, perhaps a big un, but then they're lucky."

"And phwat is a nugget?"

"A lump of gold, clear gold, Dan, with no ore in it."

"And how big is it?"

"As big as a lump of chalk," laughed Lew.

"Sure, that's no answer. Maybe I might find wan meself," and Dan waded out and thrust his hand deep down in the sand.

"Oh, glory, I've got wan!" he presently cried, dragging up something from the bottom.

It was only a common stone, however, and Lew laughed heartily at his friend's enthusiasm.

"Try again, Irish," he said, with a laugh.

"Faix, I will," retorted Dan, but at that moment Lew's attention was suddenly attracted by some sound in the thicket.

He sprang to the bank, seized and cocked his rifle, and peered into the bushes.

A man suddenly glided out from behind a rotten stump and hurried away, being evidently not at all anxious to be seen.

"Ben Black!" muttered Lew. "What's that coyote doing on my trail? Thought he war bound to Yreka. Durn his hide. If I thought he war up to mischief I'd 've drawn a bead on him and shot him as I would a wolf."

"Come on, Dan," said Lew, hastily. "Put that in your pocket. We must break up our camp and leave these diggings. Ben Black is around, and that means an end to our prospectin' in this yer quarter."

"And where are ye goin' thin, me bye? Aren't we goin' to stay here?"

"No," said Lew, fiercely. "That villain is up to some mischief. First I see Injun signs and then I see him, and the two together must mean something. Come, there's no time to lose."

An hour later Ben Black and half a dozen repulsive-looking savages came upon the scene lately deserted by Lew and Dan.

"Gone!" muttered Black. "Well, they haven't taken all the gold with them, and it'll be a lucky find for me."

"My white brother has spoken false," said one of the savages. "He said we would find the young pale-face who killed two of our brothers two suns ago."

"He has escaped us, War Cloud. We were not swift enough. But do not fear. I will lead you to him before many suns shall have set."

"Ogh! it is well," grunted the savage.

"I was lucky in-changing my trail, after all," muttered Black. "Let Lightning Lew seek elsewhere for gold, for as sure as he returns here his life is forfeited."

CHAPTER VI.

DAN RAFFERTY HEARS BAD NEWS.

Three months had passed since the stormy night when Lightning Lew was driven from home, and nothing had been

heard, definitely, of the boy, although it was said that he had entered the employ of the government as a scout, and had performed excellent service.

It was a lovely spring morning, and all nature seemed smiling. The valley lying bathed in sunshine, and the cozy cabin of the settler looking more homelike and cheerful than ever.

The smoke curled up from the chimney in blue wreaths, the cows had gone to the pasture, and Mary sat in front of the porch, churning and singing softly to herself.

Presently she sighed, arose, looked across the valley toward the turnpike, pressed her hand to her forehead, and murmured:

"Three months since Lew went away, and no tidings of him yet. Bitterly has father repented driving him away, but regrets cannot bring back the light-spirited fellow, and I fear we shall never see him again."

Carrying the churn into the house, Mary soon returned, gazed down the valley again, sighed, and said:

"Nearly two months since Ben went away, and in vain have I looked for his return. Have I done right in keeping my secret? Ought I not to tell him? Mother has explained everything, and there is not the slightest blot upon her fair name. Can Ben have lied to me? I believe mother to be all that is pure and good, and yet—oh, this suspense, this suspense!"

The poor girl went about her household duties, and tried to forget the sorrow gnawing at her heart, but bitter thoughts would return in spite of her efforts to banish them.

She came to the door again at last, and looked up and down the valley, and said, half to herself, half aloud:

"No news from him, no word, no message. Has he deserted me for another? No, no, I cannot believe it, and yet I feel now that I have done wrong in not telling father and mother, and that sooner or later I shall deeply regret that I ever became the wife of Ben Black."

The grating of wheels, the cracking of a whip, and the sound of voices were now heard on the other side of the cabin, and then two men appeared in the opening in front of it.

One was Old Vet, the stage driver, wearing an old blue army overcoat, a broad-brimmed hat, coarse, woolen trousers and big boots, a whip in one hand and a pail in the other.

"Good-mornin', Mary!" the old man said, heartily. "I jist took the liberty of borrrerin' a pail from the back door. I'd like to water my horses and give myself a drink at the same time."

"Certainly, Mr. Vet," cried the girl, pleasantly. "Wouldn't you rather have a drink of milk? I'll run in and get you some."

"Thar goes the puttiest and nicest gal in all Californy," said the stage driver to his companion, as Mary ran into the house.

"Married?" asked the man, who was heavily bearded, wore a suit of blue cloth, neat boots, and a black slouched hat.

"Married? No, sir, and she ain't likely to be yet a while, for they ain't no one good enough for her around yer."

"Who is she?" asked the stranger, carelessly.

"Waal, waal, you are a stranger in these yer parts," laughed Vet. "Why, that's Mary Valleo, and this yer is the cunnel's house, as yer wanted me ter put yer down at."

"Ah, yes, to be sure," returned the stranger as he sat on a stump.

"And who mought ye be yerself?" asked Vet, eying his late passenger closely.

"Me? Oh, I'm Sheriff Harden, of Yreka, captain of the regulators."

"Waal, yer don't say. Ever seen a man by the name o' Ben Black up your way?"

"What do you know of Ben Black?" asked the other.

"Waal, not much good, I kin bet yer. He was the cause of young Lew being druv from home three months ago."

"Who is Young Lew?"

"Lew Valleo, Mrs. Valleo's son, Lightning Lew they call him. Ben Black told a pack o' lies about him and his mother, and the cunnel druv him away, but, by the eternal, stranger, there'll be trouble if ever Ben Black runs up again that boy."

"What can he do, a mere stripling?" asked Captain Harden, in a half-sneering tone.

"Ben Black'll find out," laughed Vet. "Ben Black ain't no good. That's my opinion, and, by the eternal! I don't care who knows it."

With that the stage-driver took up the pail, dipped it in the

trough at the side of the house, and passed around to the rear.

"Meddling old fool!" hissed the stranger. "Well, that is the second time he has dared to tell me to my face what he thinks of me. It won't do to expose myself, though—and even Mary did not know me."

At that moment a rough-looking man came around the corner of the house, glanced about, and said:

"Waal, Cap'n Black, I reckon how things is——"

"Sh! not so loud," muttered the other. "Someone might hear you. Don't forget that I am Sheriff Harden—and I say, Bill."

"Yaas, cap'n."

"Tell it all around that Colonel Valleo is to be sold up this morning. Let all the men around here know about it."

"All right, cap'n. But I say! I hear that Lightnin' Lew is somewheres in the neighborhood."

"Lightning Lew!" hissed Black, with a start.

"Yaas, I seen that Irishman that goes with him down by the Flats Tavern. I had a game o' poker with him, and he pretty nigh on to cleaned me out. The boy can't be fur away."

"Lightning Lew here!" muttered Black. "Here, Bill, send Joe or Tom or War Claud at once, and tell him to have a dozen or twenty Indians at the Forks as soon as possible. We may need their assistance."

"I won't lose a minute, cap'n," cried Bill Williams as he hurried away.

"Ha, ha. Matters are progressing, finely," muttered the villain, pacing up and down in front of the cabin. "That little note of mine hasn't been paid. Otten keeps out of the way, because I make it worth his while. The colonel hasn't the ready money, and to-day, in my character of sheriff, I will sell him out to the highest bidder."

Darting a look of triumph toward the house, within which he could hear Mary blithely singing, Ben Black hurried away, turned the corner, and made his way toward the mining village where he wished to hear news from Williams.

Half an hour later the latter appeared in the tavern of the place, casting a glance around to see if Black were present.

He did not see the pretended sheriff, but his eye presently fell upon a rosy looking, good-natured appearing Irishman, standing against a barrel.

"Hallo! reckon I've seen you before, hain't I?" he asked, approaching the Irishman.

"Maybe ye have, and now ye can look at me sideways, if ye like, or at me back. It's all wan to me, Misther—Misther——"

"Bill Williams is my name."

"Oh, Will Billiams, is it? Oh, yes, I remember."

"No, no; not Will Billiams, pardner. Bill Williams."

"Yis, that's what I said, Will Billiams."

"No, no; it's Bill Williams, and don't yer forget it."

"All right, Misther Bill Williams, I won't forget it. Phwat are ye doin' here at all? Trying to learn how to play poker?"

"Ha, ha! that's pretty good, Irish," laughed Williams. "You pretty well cleaned me out o' my dust, didn't yer?"

"Faix, and be the looks of yer coat, ye haven't been dusted enough yet, Bill Williams, and don't yer forget it," laughed Dan.

"No, no, Irish, I mean gold, not dust. Don't yer know nothing?"

"I do, faix. I know enough not to come back to this country if I iver get away from it."

"Oh, there's lots o' money to be made here, Irish. Why, in some o' the streams yerabouts yer kin wash out a hat full o' gold in ten minutes."

"Begorry, then, I'll get a hat twice the size av this one," laughed Dan.

"And if yer've got any ready money put by," continued Williams, "yer can more'n double on it in these parts by buyin' up land."

At that moment a man entered the room and tacked up a printed notice on a post supporting the roof.

"Phwat's that, annyhow?" asked Dan, going up to the placard. "Be vartue av an attachment—niver moind that—will be sold—all and singular—faix, that's funny, to satisfy a judgment—all that piece of land known as—— Oh, glory, I must get out av this."

In another moment honest Dan Rafferty was flying down the road, muttering to himself:

"The ould man to be sould out at twelve o'clock. Faix, Lew must know of this if I have to run me legs off."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SALE BY AUCTION.

The noonday sun shone upon the pretty home of the old settler, the bees hummed about the house, the oxen in their stalls lowed, as they awaited the coming of their master, and all seemed at rest.

Colonel Valleo, resting upon a stick, came out upon the porch and looked all around, smiling as he thought how some day his land would have increased in value till he could count his money by millions.

He had been sick for a week or more, but now the bright sunshine seemed to put new life in him, and he felt almost young again.

As he stood there, lost in thought, a number of men approached, among them one whom he did not know, a man with a full beard and a dark, evil-looking face.

The others were miners, laborers and small farmers, and were all well known to the colonel.

"Good morning, friends," he said, arising and coming down the steps. "What brings you all to the valley at this time when you are usually at work?"

"Colonel Valleo," said Black, in a changed voice, "I am the sheriff, and demand the payment of a note given to Benjamin Black by Clifford Otten, and endorsed by you. It is now over due, and unless you pay it I shall be compelled to sell you out."

A murmur ran through the crowd of men, and at that moment Mrs. Valleo and Mary came hurrying from the house.

"Why are these men here? What is the matter?" cried the settler's wife.

"They have come to sell me out," said the colonel, sadly. "That note that I indorsed for Otten has gone to protest."

"Hasn't Mr. Otten paid it?" asked Mrs. Valleo of the pretended sheriff.

"No, madam, he has not. He has left the country, and your husband, as an indorser, is liable for the amount, three thousand dollars with interest at seven per cent."

"Three thousand!" cried Mrs. Valleo. "It was for three hundred only."

"That's all it was," said the colonel, sitting down, with the aid of Mary.

"The note is for three thousand dollars, and here is your signature," said the sheriff. "You will not deny it, I suppose?"

The settler looked at the paper which the sheriff held towards him, and answered, with a sigh:

"Yes, that is my signature."

"This is robbery!" cried Mrs. Valleo. "That scoundrel, Black, has raised the note from three hundred to three thousand dollars. It is a base forgery."

"The note is perfectly genuine, as far as I can see," said the sheriff, "and I have nothing to do with it. Judgment has been obtained against Colonel Valleo in the sum of three thousand dollars, with interest at seven per cent, for three months, and the matter has been put into my hands. I must collect the money somehow. If you can't pay, I must sell the place."

"Ben Black has at last shown himself to me in all his baseness," murmured the unhappy Mary, as she stood apart from the rest. "Oh, how I hate and despise that man! No, no, I cannot, for he is my husband, and in spite of his baseness I still love him."

"Gentlemen," said the supposed sheriff, nailing a copy of the notice of sale upon the fence. "I will now proceed to do my duty as an officer of the law. By virtue of a judgment obtained against Colonel Valleo in the sum of three thousand and fifty-two dollars and fifty cents, I shall now offer for sale this valuable tract of land, comprising five hundred acres, including house, barn and other buildings, and the stock, implements and furniture contained therein. How much am I offered? Give me a good bid, gentlemen."

"Two hundred dollars," said the colonel. "It is all the money I have in the world."

"Two hundred dollars!" cried Black. "Two hundred dollars for this valuable——"

"Three hundred," cried Bill Williams, who sat on a stump at one side of the clearing.

"Four hundred," bid one of the miners.

"Five hundred," said Bill Williams, before the auctioneer could state the last offer.

"Five hundred dollars," said Black. "Any more, gentle

men? This is a rare chance, but I really ought not to let it go so cheap. Any more than five hundred?"

"Who wants all that money, begorry?" cried a voice on the outside of the crowd and Dan Rafferty pushed his way forward.

"Hallo, Irish, here's yer chance ter make a good investment," cried Bill Williams. "This yer farm is going for five hundred dollars."

"I'll give six hundred, thin," cried Dan. "I'll not see the ould man sould out if I know it."

"Heaven bless you for those words," cried Mrs. Valleo, coming forward.

"Six hundred dollars!" shouted the auctioneer. "Do I hear any more?"

"Seven hundred," cried Williams.

"Eight hundred," cried old Vet, as he suddenly came upon the scene, and that's all the money I've got, but I'll give every dollar of it to help out an old friend—I will, but the eternal!"

"Hooroo for you!" shouted Dan. "That's the sort av talk I like to hear."

"Eight hundred dollars, gentlemen, for this valuable piece of property. Do I hear any more offers? Once, twice——"

"A thousand dollars," said Williams.

"Oh, wurra, would ye look at that?" moaned Dan. "I say, Mr. Vet, I'll chip in wid ye and buy the place for th' ould man."

"Dash my buttons, Irish, if yer ain't a trump, by the eternal you are!" roared the veteran stage driver, excitedly. "I'll go yer, darn me if I don't!"

"Twelve hundred dollars, ye black-muzzled pirate!" yelled Dan. "Begorry, ye'll not get the place away from the ould man if Dan Rafferty can prevent it."

"Seventeen hundred dollars," said Williams, and the auctioneer announced the bid.

"Heaven help us, we are lost!" moaned Mrs. Valleo, wringing her hands.

"Seventeen hundred dollars I am offered," cried Black, while Colonel Valleo sat with bowed head, as if awaiting the blow which was to sweep away his home forever. "Seventeen hundred once, seventeen twice, third and last call, seven——"

"Two thousand!" cried a clear, ringing voice, and at the next instant Lightning Lew, the boy scout, sprang into the open space, before the cottage.

"Lew, Lew, thank heaven for this!" cried Mrs. Valleo, throwing her arms around the boy.

"Have you got the money with you?" demanded Black, insolently. "This is a cash sale, you understand."

"I understand," said Lew, looking fixedly at Black, "and the money is here," and the young scout threw a bag of gold dust upon the ground.

"Then you must have stolen the money, and I can't take your bid," was the surly answer. "The farm goes to Mr. Williams for——"

"Look yere, stranger," growled old Vet, stepping forward. "it ain't no consarn o' yourn whar the boy got his dust, and if he offers you a bid, by the eternal, you've got to take it. Ain't I right, boys?" turning to the miners.

"You are!" they all shouted, and Ben Black bit his lip in anger.

"Two thousand dollars is bid," he announced. "Two thousand! Do I hear any more offers? Come, come, gentlemen, we must not let it go so cheap as that. What do you say, Mr. Williams?"

Mr. Williams did not say anything just then, and for a good reason.

Dan Rafferty, suspecting collusion between the miner and the auctioneer, had crept around outside the crowd till he reached Bill Williams, being hidden by the latter from Black.

"Say another wurrud, ye ugly divil, and I'll put a hole clean through ye," he muttered in the man's ear, pressing the muzzle of a revolver close to his temple.

"Two thousand dollars!" repeated the auctioneer. "Don't you want to go higher than that, Mr. Williams?"

"Say no, ye divil!" whispered Dan.

The miner trembled so that he couldn't utter a sound.

"Twenty-five hundred is bid," said Black.

"Twenty-eight," said Lew. "That was your own bid, wasn't it?"

"Three thousand!" hissed Black, with an evil look.

"Thirty-five hundred," said Lew, before Black had well finished.

"Don't ye dar' say a word," whispered Dan in Bill Williams' ear.

"Can't do it, pard. That's bigger 'n my pile," muttered Williams, ruefully.

"Thirty-five hundred!" cried the auctioneer. "Once, twice, do I hear any more, third and last call, thirty-five hundred dollars! Sold! Where's your money?"

"Where's your note?" demanded Lew.

Ben Black took the note from his pocket, crumpled it up, threw it contemptuously on the ground, and said:

"There's your note!"

Lew picked it up, smoothed it out, examined it carefully on both sides, counted out thirty-five hundred dollars in gold and notes, made a bundle of them, threw them at the auctioneer's feet, and said:

"And there's your money! It isn't the first time you've stooped to enrich yourself by fraud, I'll warrant."

CHAPTER VIII.

A TERRIBLE ACCUSATION.

The sale was over, and Lightning Lew had saved the old house.

The miners and laborers had now departed in different directions, and Black went off with Bill Williams, stopping for an instant to say:

"You can't blame me, colonel. I only did my duty."

"You get out!" cried Vet. "If I'd ha' knowed what sort of feller you was, you'd never have come yer on my stage, by the eternal you wouldn't!"

"Bah! You're an old fool!" growled Ben Black, as he strode away, followed by Williams.

"There's your note, Colonel Valleo," said Lew, handing the paper to the old man. "Take care of it, for it may prove valuable to you some day."

"Oh, Lew, thank heaven for this!" cried Mrs. Valleo, embracing the boy. "You came home just in time to save us all. Where have you been for the past three months?"

"Acting as government scout," answered Lew.

"Follow that man to the settlement, Dan," whispered Lew, taking the Irishman aside. "Find out all you can about him, for I suspect him. I have seen him, heard his voice before, but where I can't remember."

"Faix, I'll find out all I can, me bye," cried Dan, hurrying away.

"Good-day, friends," said Vet. "I'm right durned glad that the skunk didn't get the place away from yer, I am, by the eternal!"

"You are a noble fellow, Vet," said the colonel in a choking voice, "and I shall never forget your kindness."

When the old stage driver had departed, Colonel Valleo extended his hand to Lew and said gravely:

"Can you forgive me, Lew, for the wrong I did you? I take back all that I said that terrible night. It was false, every word of it, and I have been sorry for my harsh words ever since."

"Say no more, sir," murmured Lew, pressing the other's hand warmly.

"Come, let us go in," said the settler's wife. "Come, Mary, come, my boy."

"I vowed that I would never again set foot in that house," said Lew, "and I must keep my oath."

"Until you had proved yourself to be of good birth, you said, my boy," said his mother. "You are now released from your oath."

"Come," said the colonel, kindly. "I wronged you once, Lew, but now you shall be my son always, my own good son. Come! I ask it for your mother's sake."

"And for her sake I cannot refuse," said the boy, eagerly, and the reunited family entered the home saved to them by a son's devotion.

The night had fallen and all was quiet in the house when two figures stole up and listened cautiously for any sound of life.

"We must have those papers," muttered one. "Have you any idea where he keeps them?"

"No, cap'n, I hain't. Maybe they're in some cupboard."

"I must have them, Bill, if I have to kill the old man to get them. The boy cheated me out of my prey this morning, but if I get the papers all will be well."

"Let's go around to the back," muttered Williams.

The men disappeared, and presently Mrs. Valleo appeared in the doorway with a lighted candle in her hand.

"I thought I heard voices," she muttered, as she came down

the steps. "I hope no one has tried to rob us, but some terrible fear has taken possession of me, and I cannot shake it off. Father! Lew! Come out, I am afraid something has happened."

She passed around the house in the direction of the barn, and a moment later the old man appeared.

"What's the matter, mother?" he called. "Mother! I say, mother, why do you not answer?"

"Silence!" cried Ben Black, suddenly springing up from behind a mass of bushes and darting forward.

Mrs. Valleo was now in the barn and heard nothing.

"What does this mean, who are you and what do you want?" cried the colonel, coming down.

"Colonel Valleo, you must give me those papers, the title deeds," hissed Black. "You cheated me to-day, but now you cannot escape."

"Never, while I have life, shall I give them up!" cried the colonel, attempting to retreat.

The villain seized him and a struggle ensued.

"Help! Help!" cried the old man. "Lew, Mary, mo——"

"Curse you, be quiet!" hissed Black, as he plunged a knife into the poor old man's breast.

The colonel gasped, relaxed his grasp upon his murderer and fell upon the ground in front of his door.

"Sh! Come away, cap'n; someone is coming!" cried Williams, in a hoarse whisper.

The two ruffians leaped the fence and dashed away through the thicket in the direction of the road.

"Father!" cried Mrs. Valleo, coming from the barn; "where are you? Did you call? Did——"

She suddenly paused, overcome with horror, for there at her feet lay the body of her husband, the white, upturned face, the red spat on the breast, telling her of some dreadful deed just committed.

"Oh, heaven! what is this?" cried the poor woman, falling upon her knees. "My husband murdered—those two men—the angry voices I heard! Ah! I see it all! They tried to rob him, he resisted, and they took his life! Husband—husband! Speak to me! For heaven's sake, speak!"

The dying man slowly opened his eyes, his lips moved, and he muttered faintly:

"Wife, I am dying. Call Mary—and Lew—quick—I am——"

"Who can have done this?" wailed the wretched woman, picking up a bloodstained knife that lay just at his feet. "Mary—Lew—help! Your father has been murdered!"

Then she sprang up, still holding the evidence of the awful deed in her hand as Mary and Lew came running from the house.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRAITOR UNMASKED.

The young scout sprang to his father's side, kneeled and lifted the old man's head from the ground, as he eagerly cried:

"Father, father, speak! Who has done this? Tell me that you are not hurt!"

The colonel gasped, partly raised himself, thrust his hand into the breast of his coat, took out a packet of papers and said:

"Take these papers, my boy! Guard them with your life, they are the title deeds of all the property hereabouts given me by Spanish grants. Goodby, my children, goodby, mother, I——"

"Merciful heaven," cried Lew, hurriedly thrusting the papers into the bosom of his hunting-shirt, "let him not die! Speak, father, speak! Tell me who it was that——"

"It was——" muttered the dying man.

"Yes, yes, it was——"

"Your mother!" cried a deep voice, and Ben Black, accompanied by Williams, Dan Rafferty and a score of men, the nearest neighbors, suddenly stood before the astonished boy.

"My mother!" screamed Lew, springing to his feet and facing the accuser.

"Yes, your mother!" repeated Ben Black. "See! the knife is still in her hand."

Ben Black was now playing a desperate game, but he was resolved to win at any hazard.

Mrs. Valleo threw down the knife with a frantic cry, and at that moment the dying man called:

"Lew, my boy—your mother is——"

"Guilty!" said Black.

"You lie!" thundered Lew, confronting the desperate scoundrel. "Father, speak to me, tell me that mother is innocent," kneeling once more by the old man's side.

His appeal was in vain, for Colonel Valleo was dead.

"My heavens!" cried Lew, raising his hand toward the skies, "help me to find the man who has done this hideous deed. Hear my vow, oh, heaven, for here, in the presence of the dead, I swear never to rest until I have found the guilty one and brought him to justice!"

"Friends!" said Ben Black, in a smooth, plausible voice. "I do not like to see an excellent man die, but I swear to you that I saw Mrs. Valleo strike the old man down with the very knife that you saw in her hand but a moment ago."

"What motive could I have for killing him?" cried the wretched woman.

"For money," muttered Black. "This farm is a valuable one, and with the colonel dead you could sell it. But we are wasting time. Boye," turning to the crowd, "this woman is accused of murdering her husband. You have heard the evidence. What do you say, guilty, or not guilty?"

"Guilty!" came the solemn reply from nearly all present.

"You hear!" cried Black, turning toward Lew and his friends, Dan and old Vet having joined the latter. "Why this is the most cowardly murder I ever heard of. The colonel was my friend, men," turning toward the miners, "my dearest friend and the best man I ever knew; we were like brothers, and now, in a moment, he is struck down by this avaricious woman, for the sake of the money he possessed."

"It's a shame! She ought to hang for it. Up with her!" cried the excited miners, pressing forward.

"Stop!" cried Lew, advancing. "What would you do? This is my mother, the one woman in all the earth whose name I am bound to defend. You have condemned her, unheard, without the slightest evidence. Think of the days when you were boys and tell me if you would not have stood up for your mother against the world. There's not a man among you who would not!"

"No, so we wouldn't," muttered some of the men.

"And that is what I shall do!" Lew continued, with flashing eyes, "stand up for my mother against the whole world and defend her good name with my life!"

"The law must be satisfied!" hissed Ben Black.

"Law!" echoed Lew. "What do you know of law? You are a captain of regulators. What do such men care for law? They do not know what it is. I want no law but my own. I demand justice."

"Yaas, and by the eternal you shall have it!" muttered old Vet, in a deep tone.

"Stand aside!" yelled Ben Black. "We want no more sermons. The woman must swing for her crime. Now, then, boys, up with her!"

"Yes, up with her!" cried a dozen voices, as the man sprang toward the unhappy woman.

Mrs. Valleo screamed and ran to Lew's side, the young scout quickly springing in front of her, flanked by Dan and Vet.

"You shall not touch her!" he cried, covering the foremost men with his pistols. "Back, every man of you. Touch a hair of her head and you die!"

"Them's my sentiments, too!" muttered Vet.

"The man that harms either the bye or his mother is as good as a corpse, begorry!" exclaimed Dan, aiming at Ben Black.

The lynchers fell back for a moment, as if undecided what to do in the face of such decided opposition.

"The law must take its course," hissed Ben Black, darting forward. "We have made up our minds, and she must hang!"

"Ah! I know you now!" cried Lew, suddenly. "Behold your leader, my men!"

With the quickness of thought Lightning Lew sprang upon the ruffian, tore the beard from his face, and revealed him in his true character.

"Ben Black!" cried the miners.

"Ay, Ben Black, the man who drove me from home, the man who would have beggared me, the man who murdered my father!"

In another instant Lew would have sprung upon the scoundrel and choked the truth from his lying lips, but Mary, with a scream, threw herself in front of the man, and with hands outstretched cried wildly:

"Spare him, in heaven's name spare him. He is my husband!"

CHAPTER X.

OLD VET SPEAKS HIS MIND PLAINLY.

There were sad times at the settler's cabin in the valley, and the settlement was plunged in grief.

The funeral of Colonel Valleo was appointed to take place on the third day after his death, and this time had now arrived.

Ben Black had escaped on the night of the murder, and had not since been seen in the settlement, or near it.

Mary Valleo had fled with him, it was supposed, and no one knew her whereabouts, but that she had joined her villainous husband there was now no doubt.

No one believed that Mrs. Valleo had killed the colonel, and the poor woman had the sympathy of all the neighbors.

The tide of sentiment ran very strong in the settlement, and Ben Black would have stood a small chance for his life if he had appeared at this time.

There was no proof that he had killed Colonel Valleo, but he was now known to be at the head of a band of outlaws, calling themselves vigilantes in order to conceal the true nature of their acts and a judge and jury would soon have been found to condemn and hang him.

All the settlement came to the funeral, and, although the affair was perfectly decorous, the rough men of the neighborhood did not hold very decided opinions concerning Black and the men that were with him on the night of the murder.

The body of the colonel was laid away in a quiet spot on the hillside back of the house, a rough block of stone marking the place where he rested, and then the neighbors dispersed to their several homes.

The veteran stage driver remained with Lew and the widow until nearly dark, and then set out for his lonely cabin on the other side of the mountain.

He was proceeding along an unfrequented road when suddenly, as the moon emerged from a bank of clouds, he saw three men approaching.

"Durned if I ain't sorry I left my gun to home," he muttered, "for if thar aren't the three most pestiferous cusses in the whole country."

"Good evening, Mr. Vet," said Bill Williams, who was one of the trio, as the party came up.

"It's tarnation lucky for you that you can tell whether it's a good evenin' or no, Bill Williams," returned Vet. "Fur, if you'd been carried to nether a mile from yer parts in the last day or so, yer nether cusses wouldn't ha' been with the price of a plug o' musty tobacco."

"You're a meddling old fool," spoke up a second man, whom Vet had already recognized as Otten.

"I don't ask yer fer no 'pinion o' yourn, Clif Otten, and I don't want it, nuther," said Vet. "It ain't wuth takin' 'count of, nohow. How about that note o' yourn to Ben Black, what the cunnel endorsed fur yer?"

"None o' yer affairs," growled Otten. "You dig on your land and I'll dig on mine."

"Yer took mighty good care not ter be on hand when the sale come off, didn't yer? Yer was out o' the country, folks said. Why in tarnation didn't yer stay out? Did anybody send fur ye? I hain't hearn that any on us missed ye, 'cept them what yer owe."

"It's none o' yer durned business what I owe, or who I owe, you blamed ole woman," retorted Otten, angrily. "I've a lookin' good mind to put a couple o' bullets in yer and stop yer covele's jaw."

"Shut him good and right if you did," added the third man of the group.

"So it's you, is it, Ben Black?" said Vet. "Nice comp'ny, you are. Never did think much o' Otten, and I think less now, givin' him in your comp'ny. Don't know any wusser, unless it's the old duff, but even that's better'n yourn. Satan lets folks know what he's about, but you're one o' them covele's hypocrites what go 'round pretending to be so monstrous good all the time. They're meaner'n coyotes what is a lookin' fur what they kin devour."

"Come yer!" hissed Black, with his hand on a pistol. "I've a mind to shoot your covele's old head off. Say another word and I will."

"Go on, then," said Vet, with provoking coolness. "I ain't got no gun nor a thin', and they's three o' ye to one. Don't want a bit to ye that I'm a unarmed old man. That's just the kind yer all n' fight, Ben Black, the helpless and de-

fenseless. 'Tain't nuthin' new fer yer to take advantage like that."

"You infernal old meddler?" hissed Black, "I could kill you for that. Take care, you doddering old fool, or you may make me forget myself."

"I never injured chick or child, Ben Black," said the old man, "and I ain't afeared to die when my time comes. I ain't afeared to say what I think, nuther, and if yer don't like my speakin' my mind out, yer didn't orter listen, that's all I are got to say."

"Don't bother with the old fool, Ben," interposed Otten. "Come on, it's gettin' late."

"I wor to Cunnel Valleo's funeral this arternoon," said the stage driver. "I didn't see none o' you uns thar, and fur a good reason."

"Then they haven't arrested his wife yet, have they?" asked Black.

"No, they hain't, and they aren't likely to, nuther, by the eternal, they ain't."

"That woman committed the murder and I'll swear to it!" muttered Otten.

"Reckon yer will," retorted Vet, with a dry cough. "Reckon they ain't much yer wouldn't swear ter, if it jibed with yer puppus. Reckon Bill Williams'd swear to it, too, if yer was to ax him kind o' purtic'lar, but if I war axed about it, I'd swar that it war one of you three, and I'd be willin' ter leave out Otten and Bill Williams."

"Take care!" growled Ben Black. "You may know too much, and perhaps a bullet in your brain will keep you quiet."

"Yes, and that'll make another murder to yer account, Ben Black, for, as I live, I believe that it war yer hand what sent Cunnel Valleo to his last account."

"Curse you for a meddling old fool. I've a mind——"

Otten and Williams seized the man's arms before he could do any mischief, or that hour might have been the stage driver's last.

"Come, come. Don't waste any more time on the old gab-bler," muttered Otten. "He isn't wuth powder 'n shot. Come, we're late as it is."

"You're right!" hissed Black, as he went away with Otten and Williams, turning once, to add:

"That tongue of yours will be the death of you one of these days, old man. Better keep a firmer vein upon it."

"Maybe it will," muttered Vet, as he went off in the opposite direction, "but I hain't never yet been afeared to speak the truth, and, by the eternal, I hope I never will!"

CHAPTER XI.

LEW RESCUES AN INDIAN PRINCESS.

"Come, Dan, we must go and get something for the house," said Lightning Lew, one pleasant morning a few days after the funeral of Colonel Valleo. "I saw some b'ar tracks up near the canyon yesterday, and we ought to run across him."

"You go and shoot the crather, thin, and I'll make a fire and put on the pot, so as to be ready for ye."

"You're afraid, Dan," laughed Lew. "I believe you'd run the moment you saw a b'ar."

"Why wouldn't I, thin?" returned the jolly Irishman. "Thim bears is so powerful shtrong in their arrums that I have no desire to get a hug from thim. They're worse than Kate Brophy in Ireland, who could break a man's ribs when she hugged 'um."

"What's to hinder putting a bullet in her, Dan?" asked Lew, with a laugh.

"A bullet in Kate Brophy, is it? Oh, wurra! that 'ud be murder intirely."

"No, I mean put a bullet into the b'ar."

"Faix, he wudn't let me, or if I fired, I'm that bad on the aim that I might shoot ye instead and that 'ud be turrible, me bye."

"Well, then," said the boy scout, laughing, "I tell yer how we can fix it."

"Whisper! Don't let any av the bears hear ye."

"Why, you can aim at me and then you'll be sure to hit the b'ar, Dan."

"Go on wid yer palaverin' and go shoot the crather if ye expect to have annything for dinner."

"Oh, but if I leave you in the house the Injuns will come."

"Faix, then, I'll go wid ye, me buck, for bechune bears and Injines I'll take the warmints, as ould Vet calls them," cried Dan, who was not so much afraid as he pretended.

"Good-by, mother," called out Lew, as he left the house. "We won't be gone long."

The two companions struck across the clearing, skirted the woods for half a mile, and then took a straight line through a ravine towards the hills.

Leaving the ravine they hurried along at the foot of the hills for a little distance, taking the side of a mountain stream which roared and tumbled at their feet, now shut in by high, steep banks, and then gliding gently along the surface deep and silent.

"There's a log bridge a bit further up," said Lew, "and we'll cross the run thar and make fur the place where I saw the b'ar tracks. There's an Injun village four or five miles from hyar, and I don't want them to see the b'ar fust."

"Wow-wow! bears and Injines together!" wailed Dan, pretending to be terribly frightened. "Why, oh, why did I ever leave ould Ireland?"

Lew was about to reply, when a piercing shriek fell upon his ear from a point somewhat in advance of him.

Without an instant's hesitation he dashed forward in the direction of the sound, followed by Dan.

The stream had taken a bend, but the travelers had kept on in a straight line so as to intercept it when it returned to its old course.

Lew reached it in a few moments, at a point where a fallen tree had been thrown across from bank to bank, serving as a bridge to those who passed this way.

The young scout glanced hastily around, but could see nothing, and was about to call to Dan, when the cry that had startled him before was now repeated, under his very feet as it seemed.

In an instant he was upon this rude bridge and the cause of that wild cry was revealed.

Below, struggling in the mad waters of the mountain torrent, and clinging despairingly to the root of a tree which had somehow made its way between the rocks nearly to the water's edge, was a young Indian girl of surpassing beauty, the utmost terror depicted upon her face.

It could be easily seen that her strength was rapidly failing, and that even if the slender root to which she clung continued to stand the strain upon it, which seemed extremely doubtful, she could sustain her hold upon it for only a short time.

"Come, Dan, come quick!" shouted the boy, unslinging his rifle, casting off his belt and throwing all upon the bank.

Dropping to his knees upon the tree, Lew quickly swung himself off, caught by his hands, dropped to his full length, hung for an instant, glanced swiftly down, and then dropped into the stream.

The water was deep as well as swift, and the boy sank over his head when he struck the current.

He arose in an instant, close beside the Indian girl, whom he seized with one hand and cried impressively:

"Let go your hold. I will save you if you do as I say."

It was hardly a matter of choice, for the root, already strained beyond its strength, now parted and the girl's hand fell at her side.

The two were at once swept down stream, but Lew knew his strength, and, calling to the girl to make no resistance, swam with one hand and kept in the middle of the current till he reached a point where it was divided by an immense boulder.

The greater part of the stream flowed from here to the right, or towards the bank opposite to that where Lew had left Dan, the part on the left being quite narrow and by no means deep.

With one strong stroke the boy shot into this branch of the stream, where he reached the fork, and in another moment had seized an overhanging branch and had drawn himself to his feet.

"This way, Dan!" he called, and in a few moments the faithful Irishman came scrambling down the bank and assisted Lew and his companion to ascend.

The Indian girl had fainted and Lew now laid her upon the grass, while he proceeded to wring some of the water out of his drenched garments, and then sent Dan for his rifles, pistols and belt.

In a few moments the Indian girl opened her eyes, sat up, arose, looked around her, pressed her hands to her forehead, gazed upward and then at the stream and finally, seizing both of Lew's hands in her own, covered them with kisses and fell at his feet.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CAVE IN THE LAVA BEDS—BEN BLACK THREATENS.

In one of the most inaccessible corners of the lava beds was a large cave, divided into chambers by the natural formation of the igneous rocks, and further strengthened by the addition of heavy oaken or iron-barred doors.

Here Ben Black made his way after his flight, and here he found Mary anxiously awaiting his return.

"You have seen mother and Lew?" she asked. "They are well—they do not reproach me for what I have done—they do not upbraid me for leaving them?"

"No; I have not seen them," said Black. "I did not go to see them. Do you know where those papers are—the deeds by which your father held his lands?"

"No, I do not know where they are," answered the wretched girl. "Why do you ask?"

"I want them and you must obtain them, by fair means if you can, and if not—well, I must have them, at all hazards. You understand?"

"Would you have me steal them, Benjamin?" cried Mary in terror.

"Yes, if necessary. I don't care how you obtain them, so long as I get them, for they must and shall be mine," growled Black, throwing himself down upon a rude bench at one side of the cavern.

"No, no, I cannot steal," wailed the poor girl.

"You will do whatever I say!" hissed Black, angrily. "Have you forgotten your marriage vows? You promised to love, to honor and to obey, to obey me! you understand. Why don't you do it?"

"Have I not been obedient?" answered Mary, with a sigh. "You cannot doubt my love, you know that I would give my life to shield you, but can you ask me to honor you when your whole life has been one of treachery and deceit? No, no, I cannot, and yet, knowing all that I do, my heart does not rebel, and it still clings to you; I still love you in spite of all!"

The outlaw gazed for a few moments upon the beautiful face of the poor girl, and then said with a muttered imprecation and a gesture of impatience:

"Why don't you do as I ask then? Do you call this obedience? I am determined to possess those title deeds, and you must and shall obtain them for me, no matter at what cost."

"I have deceived my mother and Lew," said Mary, sadly. "I have left the happiest home I shall ever have to go with you, I have wronged them, but I can never rob them, no, not if you were to kill me."

She looked more beautiful than ever as she stood there defying the man she loved, the firelight shining upon her pale face, and Ben Black paused for a few moments before he answered, in low, measured tones, keeping back his rage:

"Don't arouse the evil that is in me, Mary. Do not tempt me too far, do not make me forget myself. Come, come, we are wasting time, and every moment is precious. Once for all, will you obey me?"

"In everything but this, yes," said Mary, quietly; "but rob those whom I love best of all, for you—never!"

With a smothered cry like that of a wild beast baffled of his prey, Ben Black seized the unfortunate girl by her wrists and forced her to her knees.

"Then say your prayers," he growled, "for by the heaven above us, you shall never leave this place until you swear to do as I command you!"

With a cry of pain Mary struggled to her feet, threw off the villain's grasp by an effort, retreated a few paces, and said:

"Ben Black, you are a coward and a villain. The veil has been snatched from before my eyes, and I can scarcely believe what I see. I hear you, but I can scarcely believe my ears. I would not believe them, but I must. Is this the man who has made me his wife?"

Ben Black laughed contemptuously and said, after a moment:

"Wife? Ha-ha, since you defy me I will open your eyes. You are no wife of mine. You are——"

"Oh, my heaven! not his wife," screamed the wretched girl, covering her face with her hands.

"No!" growled Black, with a brutal laugh. "The ceremony was nothing but a farce, the man who performed it was one of my pals. He was no more a clergyman than I am. Ha-ha-ha, my wife indeed!"

"Oh, heaven, have mercy upon me!" cried Mary, now fall

ing upon her knees, "Ben, Ben, my husband, my life, recall those terrible words; say that you were but jesting, say that you never meant them, tell me that they were untrue, or, if they are, kill me and I will die with a blessing on my lips!"

"It's too late to recall them," muttered the lying scoundrel, "but if you will do as I ask you, I will make reparation; swear to me that you will get me those papers and this night shall see us man and wife."

He approached her as if to lift her up, but, springing to her feet with a gesture of loathing and disgust, Mary cried passionately:

"Away! Do not touch me. My blood boils when I hear you speak, and I wonder that I do not sink down in shame and degradation."

"This is my punishment for leaving those who loved me. Kill me, if you will, I care not how soon. All I ask is that I may be laid near to my poor father's grave."

"Mary," said Black, resolving to try strategy and persuasion when threats and force seemed only to defeat his purpose, "listen to me and you will think less harshly of me, even forgive me for what I have done."

"I am listening," said Mary, who loved the false-hearted scoundrel in spite of herself, despite reason, despite all that he had said or done. "I am listening."

"My morning of life was one of hope," continued Black, "youth painted for me in glowing colors a bright and brilliant future. Then my mother died and with her my hopes. My father, too, was taken away, and, with his latest breath he made me swear to avenge the wrong your mother had done him. My first act was to gain your love and confidence and then followed our marriage—our pretended marriage, you understand. Then the demons tempted me. I would be rich, I would possess unbounded wealth. I knew that if your father died I would soon enjoy all he possessed; my soul coveted his possessions. I tried to make them mine by trickery, but the scheme failed and then—then I killed him!"

"You killed him!" cried Mary, in the utmost horror. "You killed him!"

"Yes, and now do what I ask, or your grave shall soon be ready for you."

"Mother!" screamed the terrified girl. "Do you dare to tell this to me? May a curse fall upon you—may the blood of your victims fall like drops of molten lead upon your heart every moment of your life—may the faces of those you have wronged haunt you, sleeping or waking, and may your life be one of endless misery—may——"

"Silence, woman!" roared Black, snatching a murderous-looking knife from his belt. "Silence, I say, or I will——"

At that moment there came a startling interruption.

CHAPTER XIII.

LEW AND DAN ON THE MARCH—THE DRUNKEN INDIAN—IN THE NICK OF TIME.

"Begorry we're on the march once more and now I hope there'll be some fighting," said Dan, as he and Lightning Lew took their departure with the soldiers.

"Yes, Dan, but suppose that you get killed," said Lew.

"Oh, begorry, I niver thought av that, me bye. Wan av them Injines might pop me off like a crow on a fence and that wud be the last of me. Maybe if I jined the Injines, I'd be safer."

"Yes, and then I might shoot you myself," said Lew, with a laugh.

"Oh, wurra, sure ye wudn't do that, Lew, me bye," exclaimed Dan, making a wry face. "Sure, ye'd know it wor me all the time."

"Mebby so, Irish, but the troops wouldn't."

With steady tread the soldiers marched on, a company of horse leading the way, mile after mile being passed in silence.

They had approached within a short distance of the place where the last encounter with the hostiles had occurred, when they were met by two army scouts, riding on Indian ponies.

"The savages have abandoned the lava beds," said one of these, "and nothing can be seen of them."

"Then we shall have to find them," said the captain. "We will wait here for orders."

"I reckon it wouldn't be hard to find 'em," said Lew. "You can depend on't that they haven't gone fur off."

"There isn't an Indian in the lava beds," said one of the scouts in a decided tone.

"Maybe you didn't find 'em, stranger, but they're thar, I reckon," answered Lew.

This reply seemed to nettle the other, and he said angrily:

"If there were Indians there we would have found them. There's no better scouts in the army than we are."

"Whar have ye scouted, stranger?" asked Lew quietly.

"On the plains."

"Waul, this here country ain't the plains, stranger."

"And in the mountains, too."

"This yer place ain't like any mountains you ever see. I'll find plenty of Injuns for you. Come on, Dan, thar's work fur us."

"What does that boy know about it?" Lew heard the scout say to the captain as he rode off.

"A good deal, I think," was the answer. "He has lived in this country all his life."

"Come on, Dan," said Lew, "that fellow is only a tender-foot. I'll find out whar the Injuns have hid themselves."

"And begorry, the Injines may find us out first," muttered Dan, "but all the same, I'm wid ye, me bye, through fire and wather."

They presently hitched their horses in a little piece of woods and advanced in the direction of the lava beds.

Half a mile further they came upon a deserted hut standing near the dry bed of a mountain stream, the place having once been used by some wandering prospector or miner, apparently.

"Wait here, Irish, till I go on and look around a bit," said Lew as he went forward.

"Faix, I wondher phwat sort av place this is, anyhow?" muttered Dan, advancing to the door of the cabin and looking in.

At that moment and for an instant only he saw the feathered topknot of an Indian through a window at the rear of the hut.

"Begorry, there's a Injine," he muttered. "I'll shoot the head off him, so I will."

Harrying outside he crept cautiously around the corner of the hut, gun in hand.

Unknown to the Irishman, the Indian had seen Dan and had made up his mind to capture him.

He also started around the house, but took the same direction taken by Dan.

The latter crept along with the utmost caution expecting to see the Indian's topknot every moment.

When he reached the little window he looked in cautiously and saw the savage's head for an instant.

"Oh, begorry, ther' he is; I'll fix him this time," he muttered, as he turned.

The Indian did the same thing and he and Dan were therefore following each other as before.

When Dan reached the door again he looked in and again saw the feathered topknot for a moment, as the savage dropped to the ground.

"Faix, I'll have him this time," he muttered, as he kept on in the same direction.

Slowly and cautiously he crept on, his gun in his hand, ready to fire as soon as he saw the enemy.

It was beginning to grow dark, and Dan made up his mind that he must do something at once.

On and on he crept, listening for every sound, when all of a sudden, as he turned a corner, he ran against the Indian, who had turned when seeing Dan in the door.

The fellow was not as dangerous as the Irishman had supposed, for he had been drinking some poor whisky given him by Bill Williams, and was in a very befuddled condition.

The sudden collision threw him upon his back, while Dan sat down.

"Begorry, it's no manners ye have at all!" said Dan. "Couldn't ye see where ye war goin' at all?"

"Injun want rum—Injun want firewater!" grunted the savage. "No bad Injun—good Injun—want firewater."

"Begorry, you'll get it, then," said Dan, staggering to his feet. "Faix, I'll not kill ye at all, but take ye prisoner."

As Dan advanced the drunken Indian arose, staggered forward and fell into his arms.

"Good Injun, like paleface, like firewater," he said. "Give Injun rum, give Injun whisky."

He was in a very maudlin state, and more stupid than dangerous, for he began to hug Dan and to call for firewater in the silliest fashion.

"Go an, ye drunken loafer," cried Dan, throwing the man

from him. "Sure I thought ye was a bloodthirsty Injine and ye're nothin' but a tipsy fool."

The Indian sat down heavily, and at that moment Lightning Lew came hurrying to the spot.

When he saw the Indian's condition, however, he laughed and said:

"I've got an idea, Dan. We'll make this drunken fool show us the way to the Injun camp."

"Firewater, rum, good Injun want whisky," said the savage, getting up.

"Where does my red brother set up his wigwam?" asked the boy scout.

"Injun no hab wigwam. Injun live in cave, paleface no find, good paleface give Injun rum."

"Show me the way and I will give you firewater."

"Paleface good, Injun good, me show. Injun live in cave, Ben Black live in cave, white squaw live, Injun want rum."

"You shall have it," cried Lew excitedly. "You saw that Ben Black and the white girl are in the cave?"

"Injun say so, Injun want rum, Injun good feller."

"Show me the way, my red brother, and you shall have it," said Lew.

The savage smiled foolishly and led the way, Dan and Lew following.

Night had fallen when they entered a pass leading through the lava beds, the black rocks towering above their heads, while here and there the way seemed to be entirely blocked.

Drunk as the Indian was, he knew the path, and at the end of a quarter hour he passed through an opening in a great mass of rock, and beckoned Lew to follow him.

As he entered the cave, the boy suddenly heard a startling cry, a cry for help, and in his sister's voice.

Without an instant's hesitation he dashed forward, and found himself in a rock-built room lighted by a fire of logs, and there, in the center of the cave, stood Ben Black about to plunge a gleaming knife into Mary's breast.

"Hold!" shouted Lew. "Throw up your hands or you are a dead man!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PRISONERS OF THE CAVE.

At the sound of Lightning Lew's voice Ben Black stepped back and glared angrily at the intruder with a fierce scowl on his evil face.

Mary sprang to her feet and rushed to Lew's side with a glad cry upon her lips.

"Lew, Lew, thank heaven, you have come to save me from this scoundrel!" she cried.

"Make one step, utter one sound to betray my presence here, Ben Black," cried Lew, throwing his arm around Mary, "and I will kill you! Come, sister, make haste. We must leave this place at once."

As Lew started to leave the cavern, his pistol still pointed at the outlaw, Ben Black suddenly drew a silver whistle from under his neck cloth and blew a loud blast.

Then he sprang aside with the swiftness of a tiger at the moment that Lew fired.

The bullet whistled past his head and flattened itself against the wall of the cave.

Lew was instantly seized and disarmed, two brawny savages seizing Mary and holding her fast.

"A little wide of the mark, my friend," laughed Black. "Warecloud, this is the young white chief who killed your brothers a few days ago. Lock him in yonder room, and see to it that he does not escape. To-morrow he shall burn at the stake."

"No, I'll be hanged if he will, Misther Black!" cried Dan Rafferty, who suddenly rushed into the cave, a pistol in his hand.

"Fly, Dan, fly for your life!" cried Lew. "Run to the fort and bring the soldiers here. You can find your way back, and if you are not in time to save our lives, you can at least avenge our deaths."

"Yes, Dan, fly!" cried Mary. "Fly for your life!"

But Dan was captured and with Lew and Mary were imprisoned behind grated doors.

At that moment Otten came in and said:

"What's all the fuss about, Ben? I heard shots and a lot o' noise and couldn't sleep?"

"That infernal Lightning Lew came here to rescue Mary, and pretty nearly made me pass in my chips, but I've got

the young villain under lock and key and he won't escape me now."

"Why don't you kill the troublesome young varmint?" muttered Otten.

"The Indians'll do that for me, never fear. He won't trouble me any more."

"Has he got the papers?"

"No, I think not. They are kept in some safe place. I did not think to search him. Maybe he has them on his person. I did not think of that?"

"Where is he?"

"In that grated room."

The man walked to the grated door, shook the bars and said, with an angry growl:

"Come yer, youngster, I want ter speak ter yer!"

"What do you want, Mr. Otten?"

"Them papers. Have you got 'em?"

"What papers?"

"The title deeds to the cunnel's property."

"I used to think that you were our friend, Mr. Otten," said Lew, "but now I know that you ain't. I haven't got the papers, and if I had you shouldn't have them."

"Better search him, Ben," muttered Otten, turning to Black.

A long-drawn, mournful cry, like the scream of some night-bird, was now heard outside the cave.

"What's that?" gasped Otten, with a shudder.

"The Indian sentries calling to each other. Hark! that is the answer."

"Sounds like a coyote or somebody in distress," muttered Otten. "Can't they make any cheerfuller noise than that?"

"Well, come, let's search the cur for the papers."

"I haven't got them," said Lew, "and you need not waste your time in searching me."

Black threw open the door, and he and others rushed into the cell.

Ben Black seized Lew and held him firmly, while others searched him thoroughly.

There were no papers or anything of value found upon him, however, and Black asked with a growl:

"What have you done with them, boy?"

"Never you mind. I do not intend that you shall get possession of them."

"If you don't tell me where they are I'll put a bullet through you!" hissed Black, drawing a pistol.

"And lose the secret forever," said Lew. "Fire upon a helpless man, you coward, but remember that you add but another crime to the long list of your offenses, and that one day, as sure as there is a heaven over our heads, you shall meet with a just punishment."

"Come on," growled Otten. "He hasn't got the papers and he won't tell yer where they be. Try the old woman. He can't help her now, and she'll have to give in to yer."

"I will," muttered the outlaw as he left the place, closing and locking the door after him.

Then he threw the key upon a barrel and said:

"You watch here, Otten, you and the boys, till I come back. I'll be here by morning."

"All right, cap'n. I'll keep watch in here and them howlin' niggers of Injuns'll keep watch outside, I reckon."

"Don't let the prisoners escape, mind," muttered Black, "for I'll hold you responsible if you do," and so saying, the outlaw left the cavern.

CHAPTER XV.

AN IRISHMAN'S READY WIT.

After the departure of Ben Black, Warecloud and one or two of his comrades entered the main cavern and squatted on the hard floor.

"It'll be a cold night," muttered Otten, "and if I've got ter watch here I mought as well be comfortable."

He threw some sticks of wood on the fire, took a drink from a flask which he drew from his pocket, and then seated himself on a low bench in front of the fire and seemed to be thinking.

"Give Warecloud whisky," said the brave.

"No," growled Otten, "yer've had enough. Are any of the boys around?"

"Paleface in cave outside," answered the savage.

"Tell 'em to come in yer. It's lonesome with nobody but Injuns."

"Faix, I'd make things lively for ye if I was down there, me bye," muttered Dan.

The Indian went out, and presently two or three rough-looking men dressed as miners entered.

"Make yourselves easy, boys," said Otten. "The cap'n has gone to the settlement and won't be back till mornin'. I've got ter watch the prisoners, and it's lonesome business."

The dismal cries of the Indian sentinels could be heard at short intervals, now loud and now faint, and one might well have shuddered at the weird, unearthly sound heard at night and in such a place.

"Howl away, ye divils!" muttered Dan.

"S'pose we lie down and take a snooze," suggested Otten. "All is safe enough and we mought have lots ter do in the mornin'."

"That's what I say."

"Cert'nly, let's take a snooze."

All was silent in the cave, the occasional snapping of a stick on thre fire or the heavy breathing of the sleepers being the only sound.

Dan Rafferty, in the little low cell overlooking the main cavern, had dropped into a doze in spite of himself, when he was suddenly aroused by a soft touch upon his cheek, and by a low, purring sound.

"Begorry, what have I got here?" he muttered.

It was a kitten, not more than six weeks old, fat, soft and round.

The kitten purred and mewed as Dan held it in his hand and smoothed its fur, and presently there was an answering mew and the mother cat came out from some corner of the cave, hidden by the darkness, and leaped upon Dan's legs.

Suddenly, as the dying fire flared up for an instant, the light fell upon the keys below, which he had forgotten for a time.

"Oh, glory be to the blessed saints, but I've got an idee!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I'll have thim kays after all, so I will."

The distance was too great for him to reach down with his hand, even if he could have passed his arm through the spaces in the grating, being nearly four feet from the floor of the upper cave to the top of the barrel.

Removing the colored neck-cloth that he wore, Dan made a sling of it, passed the looped portion under the cat's body and knotted it tightly enough to prevent the creature from slipping out, and yet not so tightly as to hurt it.

"I wondher if it's long enough," he muttered, looking down at the barrel. "Indeed it's not, but I have me belt and me braces, and it's a pity if I don't get thim kays up, either be hook or be crook."

Taking off his belt, he tied the end of the silk neck-cloth to the buckle, and then, pushing the kitten between the bars, lowered it to the barrel.

"Now thin, pussy, bring me up thim keys," he muttered, letting out his strange cable. "fetch them up to Danny and he'll give ye a bowl of milk as soon as he gets out of this murdherin' hole av a cave."

The kitten, suspended in air, was clawing about in desperate fashion, trying to get a hold for its feet, and mewling piteously.

The instant he reached the barrel it closed upon the bunch of keys tied together with a stout leather thong.

The moment that Dan heard the keys rattle he hauled in on his improvised line and in a few seconds the kitten had been drawn through the grating, the keys still in its grasp.

"Glory be to goodness, I've got thim," he muttered, "and now to free Miss Mary and Masther Lew and lave this place foriver."

CHAPTER XVI.

"TWIXT THE CUP AND THE LIP."

Releasing the kitten, Dan put on his belt and neck-cloth, took the keys and crept to the door of his cell, after darting a hasty glance through the grating to see that the Indians and outlaws were still asleep.

Just then the weird cry of a sentry outside the cave was heard and Dan shrugged his shoulders.

After trying one or two keys Dan found one that would fit the lock, and in a moment the heavy door swung open.

He descended half a dozen rude steps cut in the rocks, and followed a passage which brought him into the outer cave.

"Now which way do I go?" he thought, glancing around.

"If I was out I'd know the way, but I get turned about in this place. Let me see; I think this is the way."

At the end of a few steps, however, he found himself at the mouth of the cave, and at that moment a dark figure loomed up against the light.

"Oh, begorry, I come nearly puttin' me fut in it that time," he muttered as he hurried back. "Well, it's a good thing I know that there's wan of the Injuns outside, for now we can be on our guard."

Following the passage in the opposite direction the faithful fellow soon entered the cavern where the Indians and outlaws lay asleep.

"Faix, I've got it this time, and now to awaken the bye and get out av this turrible place."

Stepping carefully between the Indians he reached the grated door behind which Lew and Mary were prisoners.

Hastily fitting a key in the lock, he opened the door and awoke them. They then went outside.

"Sh! wait a moment," said Lew. "We must procure weapons first. Hand me that basket."

There was a small basket made of woven grass lying at the foot of the barrels, and Dan now picked this up and crept to Lew's side.

The boy then stole between the lines of sleepers, reached down and deftly removed the knives and pistols from Otten's belt.

These were placed in the basket, and the weapons of the next man were then taken from him.

Moving noiselessly from one to the other, Lew took the weapons of whites and Indians, Dan following close at his side with the basket.

They had reached the fire and Lew was about to remove the tomahawk and knife from Warcloud's belt, when his quick ear caught the sound of a step outside.

"Sh! down with you!" he hissed.

Dan sank to the floor in an instant, and Mary hid behind the barrel, while Lew seized a blanket thrown across one of the savages, and dropped it upon the smoldering fire.

At that moment a painted Indian entered, and poor Mary gave herself up for lost.

In a moment the place was shrouded in darkness.

The Indian gave a grunt and left the place, his cry being presently heard outside.

Lew took the blanket from the fire, blew steadily on the embers for a few moments, until a flame appeared, and then whispered:

"Come, we have no time to lose. Arm yourselves, for we may have to fight our way out."

Dan and Mary each took a weapon, and then Lew led the way, taking Mary's hand, followed by Dan, with the basket of revolvers and knives.

They had almost reached the door, when Dan, striking his foot on some projection, stumbled and dropped the basket.

It fell to the floor with a crash, and one of the pistols was discharged.

In an instant the outlaws and Indians sprang to their feet.

"An escape!" roared Otten.

"Stop them!"

CHAPTER XVII.

SURROUNDED BY MANY DANGERS.

"Stand where you are!" cried Lew. "The first man that advances or gives an alarm will be shot!"

"Curse you!" hissed Otten; "how did you escape? Down with them, men! They must not escape!"

The Indians and outlaws dashed forward, hoping to overcome the fugitives by force of numbers.

Crack! crack! crack!

In an instant there was a succession of sharp reports, followed by shrieks and groans.

Crack! crack! crack!

Lew and Dan fired rapidly, and more than one of the enemy fell, but there was danger that those outside would hear the shots, and that the fugitives would be caught between two fires.

"Come!" hissed Lew, "we must leave here at once."

Mary was already behind him where no chance shot could reach her, and Lew now fired two or three quick shots, seized the girl by the waist, and rushed out. Dan followed, after firing his last shot, and in a moment the fugitives were outside the cave.

Two brawny Indians suddenly appeared as if from the ground, and Mary uttered a scream of terror.

Dan leaped forward, dealt the savages two swinging blows, and stretched them both at his feet.

"Thim two won't bother us for a while yet," he muttered, "but there's more beyant."

"Make haste!" cried Lew. "The men in the cave will give the alarm."

"Indeed, thin, they won't," laughed Dan, "for I locked the dure on them, and I have the keys in me pocket."

"This way, then," replied Lew, taking Mary's hand and hurrying along the rough pathway.

The moon suddenly came out from behind a cloud, and Lew dropped to the ground.

In an instant the warning cry of the watchful sentinels was heard, being presently repeated from point to point.

Lew himself repeated the cry, presently changing it for that which said that all was well.

"There's an Injun over there behind that pile of rocks," he whispered, "and I reckon he saw us before we dropped."

"Do we have to go by the place, me bye?" asked Dan.

"Yes."

"Faix, that's mighty inconvenient annyhow."

"Wait here till I return," was the whispered reply, "and do not move under any circumstances."

"Phwere are ye goin'?"

"To settle with that Injun," said Lew quietly, as he glided swiftly away.

Five minutes passed, and Mary was beginning to be alarmed, for she could hear cries all around, and feared that Lew had met with some harm.

"Go and find him, Dan," she said to her companion. "Something has happened. I know there has."

"Faix, I'd go in a minute, me dear young leddy," whispered Dan, "but yer brother towld us not to move out of this, and——"

"Sh!" hissed Mary, seizing Dan's arm as they crouched on the ground. "There is an Indian now."

"Begorry, thin, I'll settle him, thin," and Dan jumped to his feet.

An Indian stood within three feet of him, but Dan, thinking only of Mary, drew his knife and leaped forward.

"Sh! it's only me, Irish," said the well remembered voice of Lightning Lew.

"Oh, glory! sure, it's well ye spoke, me bye. In another minute ye wud have had me knife bechune two of yer ribs."

"I'm glad to see you were so careful, Dan."

"Yis, but how come ye dressed up like an Injine?"

"That fellow over there let me his clothes."

"Lent ye thim, is it?" asked Dan, with a puzzled look.

"Waal, that is, I borrowed 'em without asking him."

"And where is he now?"

"Over thar by the rocks."

"And won't he raise a ruction and give the alarrum?"

"I think not," answered Lew, quietly; "but come on, we mustn't waste time."

"Ye muzzled him, thin, did ye?" pursued Dan as Lew led the way, the moon having now gone behind a cloud.

"He won't give us any more trouble anyhow," said Lew, in a non-committal tone.

"No, I don't believe he will," muttered Dan after a pause, as he suddenly comprehended the boy scout's meaning.

"Sh! there are other Injines about," whispered Lew, "and they must not hear you. Come, in a short time we shall be safe."

In ten minutes they had left the lava beds, and in an hour they were once more in camp, where the soldiers hailed Lew's return with every demonstration of joy.

A man had been brought into camp suspected of being a spy, and the soldiers demanded that he be hanged at once.

It was the morning after Lew's escape from the cave in the lava beds, and when he heard of the affair he went to see the man, suspecting him to be Ben Black.

Instead of the captain of the Regulators, however, he found Bill Williams.

"So it is you?" he said. "Where did you leave your captain?"

"I hain't seen him," muttered Williams, "and I don't want ter. Me and Ben Black ain't pardners no more."

"What were you doing hanging about the camp?"

"Wasn't doin' nothin'. Ain't I got a right to go where I like?"

"You were trying to spy out something, so as to tell Black and his Indians."

"No, I wasn't," growled Williams. "Tell yer me and Ben Black has quit company."

"It's a lie, you are here for no good purpose. You are a spy and if I say the word you will be hanged without a trial."

The outlaw's florrid face turned suddenly pale and he muttered huskily:

"I ain't done nuthin' to be hung fur. I was on'y tryin' to get away from Ben Black."

"Why?" asked Lew, believing that the scoundrel was trying to invent some lie to account for his appearance about the camp.

"You know why," muttered Williams.

"No, I do not."

"Yer do. Them papers—you know—in the Injun camp."

"You mean that Ben Black is down on you because you tried to get possession of the colonel's title deeds?"

"Yes; he's madder'n sin and swears he'll kill em as soon as he sees me."

"You must have seen him, then, if you know that."

"No, I hain't. Often told me 'bout it."

"When did you see Otten?" demanded Lew. "Don't lie to me, Bill Williams, or you'll hang as sure as shootin'."

"I seen him early this morning, if yer want ter know," snarled Williams.

"Where did you see him? In the cave in the lava beds?"

"No, I didn't!" was the surly report. "I haven't been thar. I met him on the road. Him and the Injuns busted the door down after you 'uns got away. Him and Ben Black had a row 'cause of his lettin' you get off."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BILL WILLIAMS LEAVES THE COUNTRY.

"Where is Otten now?" asked Lew. "Speak the truth, Bill Williams, if you never spoke it before, for your life depends on your answers."

"I don't know whar he is," said the outlaw. "He didn't tell me whar he was goin', but he didn't go back to the cave."

"Where is Ben Black, then?"

"Dunno, 'less he's with the Injuns. Tell yer I hain't seen him, and don't want ter. I come to camp to get out'n his way."

"You were caught sneaking about the camp. Why didn't yer come straight in if yer was lookin' for protection, you miserable liar?"

"I ain't lyin' this time, Lew, so help me!" declared Williams, with great earnestness. "I'm tellin' yer the plumb truth, hope ter die this minute, if I ain't."

"Why didn't yer come straight into camp?"

"Waal, I was scared, that's why I didn't."

"Scared of what?"

"Scared of you an' the Irishman. I wanted to see if yer was here fust afore I come in and then the sojers nabbed me."

"You have nothing to fear from me, Bill Williams," said Lew, contemptuously. "You ain't wuth wastin' powder on. It's Ben Black, your master, that I want to meet."

"Ben Black ain't no master o' mine," growled Williams. "I got done with him. He wants all the glory and gives me all the work. Say, if yer won't let the sojers string me up I'll tell yer something."

"You know nothing that I don't know myself, Bill Williams," answered Lew, contemptuously.

"Yes, I do. I know the man what murdered the cunnel."

"And so do I. It was Ben Black!" cried Lew, fiercely.

"You're only guessin' at it," said Williams, eagerly scanning Lew's face.

"I am not. Ben Black boasted of it to my sister Mary."

"Oh, he did?" growled the other. "Waal, it's so, 'cause I seen him done it the nite arter the sale. He tried to get the old cunnel's papers and killed him."

"That's not all he has done, the scoundrel!" hissed Lew. "I wish that poor Mary had never seen him."

"Say!" said Williams, eagerly, a sudden thought coming to his mind, "has the coyote been tryin' ter back out of his marryin' Mary?"

"What do you know of that?" cried Lew, seizing Williams by the throat. "Were you there, did you have a hand in that vile scheme? Out with it, you ruffian, or I'll strangle you."

"Hold up, Lew, don't be in a hurry," stammered Williams.

seizing Lew's hands and sinking upon his knees. "Yes, I was thar, I was one o' the witnesses."

"And it was a true marriage?" asked Lew, his hand still grasping the outlaw's throat.

"Yes, it was."

"Swear it, Bill Williams! If you lie to me now I'll kill you!"

"So help me, it was a true marriage! The parson come from Yreka. I know him as well as I know you."

"His name?"

"Evans, he's a Welchman. He married 'em straight and gave Ben Black a paper what me and Otten put our names to."

Lew relaxed his grasp on the outlaw's throat, threw him from him and said:

"Bill Williams, you have saved your life by telling me that. I promise you that you won't be strung up this time, but I'll advise yer to leave here and never show yer face in these parts again. I'll let yer off now, because I don't believe you came here to spy out anything, but I don't forget how you tried to rob us of our home, and I'll give you just two days to get away."

"Whar'll I go?" muttered Bill Williams, doggedly.

"I don't care where you go, but don't show your ugly face around here again or I'll put a bullet through you. Now you get!"

"You bet!" snarled Williams, as he left the tent.

Lew saw him no more, for a relentless fate was upon his track, and the punishment for his many evil deeds was soon to be meted out to him.

An hour or more after he had left the camp he was hurrying along a pass in the mountains, eager to reach the settlement, collect his belongings, and leave the region forever.

As he passed a mass of boulders on the highest part of the road he heard the click of a pistol lock, and a look of fear came into his evil face.

He saw no one and heard only that ominous sound, which seemed to tell him that his moments were numbered and that death was at hand.

"Who's there?" he cried, summoning all his bravado to his aid. "Come out and face me like a man, whoever you are?"

At the summons Ben Black came out from behind the rocks, a rifle at his shoulder.

"I've been waiting for you, Bill Williams," he said. "Do you know what we do with traitors in our band?"

"I hain't no traitor," blustered Williams. "Put up that shootin' iron. What are you got agin me?"

"You tried to cheat me out of the colonel's property."

"No, I didn't. I tried to get them papers by strategy when I couldn't get them no other way. You'd ha' had 'em as soon as I got 'em."

"It's a lie!" hissed Black.

"No, it ain't cap, no, it ain't," said the other, hurriedly. "It's the truth."

"Lucky for you it is, then," muttered Black, "for I had made up my mind to shoot you the first time I saw you. Where are you going?"

"Nowheres," muttered Williams, uneasily. "I can't get too near the sojers, you know, and Lightning Lew is around."

"Well, I'm bound for the mountain," said Black, carelessly. "It ain't healthy for me to be seen in the settlement. Good-by, Bill."

"Good-by, Cap."

The outlaw hurried on, never stopping to look behind him, but making all speed down the pass.

A few minutes later Ben Black appeared on the highest point of the rocks looking intently toward a certain part of the path, distant a third of a mile.

After a minute or so a figure appeared in the road at this particular point.

There was a puff, a flash, a sharp report, a rush of air and a few seconds later Bill Williams lay dead in the path, a prey to the wolves and vultures of the mountain.

"That's what I do to all who go back on me," muttered Ben Black, as he coolly blew the smoke from the rifle barrel. "No one goes back on me with safety, I can tell you."

CHAPTER XIX.

LEW MAKES DISCOVERIES.

"You must not remain here, sister, there is too much danger," said Lew, after the departure of Williams. "You must

return to the settlement or join my mother in Ogalalla's village."

"I am afraid to leave you now, brother," said Mary. "I fear that man and feel that unless I am with you I shall be in constant danger."

"Ye need fear nothin', me dear young leddy," said Dan, who was present. "Ben Black knows very well phwat we'll do wid him if he shows his face around here."

"Do not be afraid, sister," said Lew. "I will take you to a place of safety. Dan shall go with us and no danger shall come near you."

"I do not deserve such kindness," sighed Mary, "after what I have done—after I have been so false to you all. When I think of what that villain has made me, I feel as if I ought to live, that I——"

"Say no more, sister," interposed Lew. "You are not what you fear. You are the lawful wife of Ben Black. You were married by a minister of the church."

"Thank heaven!" cried Mary, "but how do you know that?"

"Williams has told me and I believe him. The minister's name was Evans. Williams and Otten signed the certificate."

"Then at least I may look honest people in the face, although I did wrong to leave my home and go with that scoundrel."

"Yes, and the villain only lied when he said you were not his wife."

"Faix, I don't believe he can tell the truth if he tries," said Dan. "It's not in him, the robber."

"Ben Black is as false as Satan," continued Lew. "My mother has told me that she would not marry him and that he swore to have revenge, if he had to wait for years. She recognized him that night when he came to the house and knew that he was there for no good purpose."

"No, not him, the ugly vilyan," said Dan.

"Knowing him as she did, she would have warned the colonel against him, but the poor misguided man would not listen to reason and the warning was lost."

"More shame to Ben Black for it," said Dan. "It's a fine long list of evil deeds he has to answer for one of these days."

"My mother married James Redmond, one of the early settlers in California, and I was their only child. My father was killed by the Indians, and then mother married Colonel Valleo, who adopted me as his own son."

"And a finer one he couldn't have," said Dan, "and it's many a time he repented sending ye from the house that dark and stormy night. Sure it was me own bad luck that was in it, for if I hadn't been there it wouldn't have happened, be the powers!"

"No, no, Dan, you shan't say that," protested Lew. "You are my friend and have always been so. But for you I would never have left the cave alive."

"Don't forget the kitten cats," laughed Dan. "Troth, but for thim, it's meself that couldn't have done the forst thing, so I couldn't."

"Well, then, we won't forget the cat, Dan," said Lew, with a smile. "Don't give up, sister. You still have mother and me, and Dan will be your protector whenever I am not on hand."

"I will that!" cried Dan, heartily.

"I cannot realize how I could have been so blind as to love that man," said Mary, thoughtfully. "It was not love; it was madness."

"Say no more, sister," said Lew. "You are free from that scoundrel's clutches, and he shall never harm you again. He is sure to be punished for his misdeeds, for the vengeance of heaven, although sometimes long delayed, is certain to fall at last upon the head of the evil-doer."

"Ye never said a truer worrud than that, me bye," coincided Dan, with great earnestness.

Lew, Mary and Dan left the camp that day and proceeded at once to the settlement where the young scout searched out the Reverend Mr. Evans and inquired of him concerning the marriage of Mary Valleo and Ben Black.

The clergyman remembered the circumstances perfectly and recognized Mary in a moment, declaring positively that the marriage was not only legal, but that it was also registered upon the records of the county, and that no one could dispute its validity.

After having settled this matter Lew met old Vet, the stage driver, who said:

"Glad ter see ye, my boy, I am, by the eternal, and Mary, too, and you, too, Irish. How's mother Lew?"

"I left her in Ogalalla's village but the settlement is quiet now and——"

"I ain't nuthin' but a rough man, I know," said Vet, "but if the mother and this young lady will come to my cabin I reckon that mebbey they'll be safer thar than in the settlement. What do yer say, my boy?"

"That I accept your offer and thank you besides, for I know you to be a friend, and know, too, that I could not leave those I love in better hands."

"No more ye couldn't," said Dan.

"Thankee," said Old Vet, with tears in his eyes, "and by the eternal, I'll die afore I goes back on my trust."

Early the next day Mrs. Valleo and Mary took up their abode with old Vet, and Lew and Dan returned to the front.

CHAPTER XX.

"ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD."

There was a crowd around the tavern in the settlement, and all the men seemed greatly excited over something.

A deputy sheriff had just put up a notice upon a signboard in front of the tavern, and the men elbowed each other in their haste to read it.

"What does it say, boys?" asked one old man, putting on a pair of big horn-frame spectacles. "Reckon my eyes ain't as good as they useter be and fine printin' bothers me."

"It's a reward fur somebody," replied a younger man. "One thousand dollars, dead or alive."

"Waal, yer don't say? Reckon somebody'll try to get it."

"Here's old Vet," cried some one, "He kin read it."

The old stage driver approached the group at that moment and the men called to him to read out the notice on the board.

"You've got more schoolin' than the rest of us, Vet," said the old man, "and better eyes, too, I reckon. Read out the paper so's we can tell what it says."

"It's a reward."

"Who's it fur, Vet?"

"Looks ter me like that coyote——"

"Yer don't say it's that——"

"Stand aside, thar, boys, and let old Vet give it us straight."

The stage driver pushed his way through the crowd, read the notice and said:

"Waal, that thar is a reward of one thousand dollars for the body of Ben Black, dead or alive, and he is charged with the murder of Cunnel Valleo, and stirrin' up the Injuns to war."

"How'd they find out that Ben Black done it?"

"He confessed it to Mary and Bill Williams told Lew that Ben done it and that he seen him."

"Waal, no one ain't goin' to take the word of Bill Williams on it, for he's dead."

"Yon, and that's what Ben Black will be next if he ain't keered," said some one. "He's a marked man, he is."

A few minutes later a man in rough clothes, a full, red beard and a slouched hat on his head halted in front of the notice-board, looked suspiciously around and muttered to himself:

It was Otten, disguised.

"There don't no one seem ter know me, but I ain't riskin' that old feller's eyes. He'd spy out anything, the old fool, eves him! Hallo, what's this yer? Somethin' interestin', I reckon, by the way the fellers looked at it."

He read the notice of a reward, coughed nervously, looked all around, and then strolled into the tavern.

In a few minutes he came out, went to the general store, a few rods distant, made a few purchases, and then took the road to the hills.

"Ah, ha! A reward of a thousand dollars, dead or alive, for Ben Black," he mused, when he was clear of the settlement. "That's news, but I reckon it'll keep fur a bit. Reckon it's lucky nobody knowed me, or I moughtn't be able to tell Ben about it. Cif Otten ain't got many more friends than Ben Black has, but I ain't goin' to risk nuthin' comin' down here again. Fust thing I know, they'll be a notice up for me, dead or alive, and afore that time I think I'd better skip."

The revolt of the Indians, although not yet crushed, was seen to be a hopeless affair, and Otten knew that in time it would be put down and that the whites who had taken part in the war against the settlers would share the same fate as the savages.

The sun was nearing the western horizon when Mrs. Valleo,

coming out of the cabin of old Vet, glanced anxiously down the road.

Mary was by her side. They were looking at Vet, who was approaching.

"Thar she is," muttered old Vet, coming up the path, "and lookin' as purty as a picter for all the hard things she's been through. Reckon it's a good time to tell her now, good as any I'll get."

He kicked the pebbles in his path as he came on and coughed, at which Mrs. Valleo suddenly looked up, saw him and smiled.

"Yes, I know it, he is a faithful fellow, and as brave as he is faithful."

"Can I set down?" asked Vet, bringing a three-legged stool from the corner of the house. "I'd like to tell you suthin', and now seems as good a time as any."

"Certainly," said the other. "You have no need to ask that one who has been so kind to me as you have."

"Thankee," muttered Vet, as he seated himself. "I have done much, ma'am, and 'pears ter me I might ha' done more."

"No, no, you have done everything, and but for you I would have been friendless."

"You don't mind my tellin' you a story, do yer?" asked Vet suddenly. "It mought be interestin'. It is ter me, anyhow."

"Then it will interest me, I know. Tell it, by all means."

"Waal, close on ter twenty year ago there was two brothers what started to cross the prairie from St. Louis to seek their fortunes in Californy, like lots others at that time."

"Yes," said the listener.

"There was a young woman in the party, the pride of the train she was, and both the brothers fell in love with her, and one fine night all hands was surprised by an invite to a wedding, the younger brother and the lady bein' the parties most interested."

Mrs. Valleo nodded, and Vet continued.

"Yes, they was married, and everybody wished 'em joy, and none of 'em more than the other brother, who wasn't a bit jealous to think the gal hadn't took him, 'stead o' the other one."

"Waal, they left the train arter they got across the plains, and settled down in a pretty little valley, whar fortun' seemed ter smile on 'em from the fust."

"Afore a year was up a little baby boy come to 'em, and he was the pride and joy of their lives, he was, and they both loved him all they could, and thought him the best baby ever there was, and was so happy that you couldn't ha' thought any trouble could ever come to 'em."

The listener sighed and old Vet, clearing his throat, went on:

"Yes'm, he was the light o' their lives, he was, and there didn't seem ter be nary a cloud on their sky, but they was comin', and at last the storm broke and everything was black and gloomy."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Mrs. Valleo.

"The Injuns began their dreadful work of destruction. One night when the young husband and wife was sittin' at their sapper, without a word o' warnin' the savages broke in upon 'em."

"The poor mother, pressing her baby to her breast, rushed from the house, fled to the settlement and gave the alarm, the neighbors returning just in time to find the house in ruins and the poor man about to be burned at the stake."

"But he was rescued?" cried Mrs. Valleo, eagerly.

"Yes, he was rescued. His brother came with the settlers and saved him."

"Yes, yes, and then?" cried Mrs. Valleo, eagerly.

"The young husband joined the gov'ment scouts, and did good work, until one day a treacherous Injin guide murdered him. His body was found by his brother, who swore to avenge his death."

"The poor woman disappeared and no one knew where she was, but I determined to find her and care for her and her child, as well as to avenge the death of the man she loved."

"You?" cried Mrs. Valleo.

"Yes. Years passed and at last I found her, but she didn't need my help, for she was the wife of an honest and loving man, and her son was——"

"Say no more!" cried Mrs. Valleo. "It is my own story you have told. You are John Redmond, my husband's brother."

"I am," said the veteran.

"Why did you not tell me this before?"

"Because then it would only bring back sad thoughts, and you was so happy I couldn't do it."

"That is why you tried to save the old home when it was in danger of being sold?"

"Yes."

"You can help me still more then," said Mrs. Valleo. "Lew gave into my keeping the title deeds of the old place, given to him by the colonel, but I fear that something may happen to me and I want you to keep them. They will be safer with you."

She took a package of papers from the bosom of her dress and handed them to Vet, who glanced at them and thrust them into his pocket.

At that moment the sun being nearly down, a shadow suddenly fell across the path, and, looking up, Vet saw Ben Black and Otten standing before him.

"Mrs. Valleo uttered a cry of dismay and would have fled into the house, but Black restrained her by a quick motion, saying at the same time:

"Stop where you are. I have something to say which concerns you both."

CHAPTER XXI.

BEN BLACK'S TRIUMPH.

"What do yer want, Ben Black?" demanded Vet, while Mrs. Valleo cast an anxious look at the house. "It ain't no good, I can tell yer."

"You know well enough what we want," muttered Otten. "You are accused of robbing the mail coach, and we intend to search yer and prove it."

"Robbin' the mail coach!" cried Vet. "Why, coyotes and rattlesnakes, if that ain't the biggest lie I ever heard! Search me, hey? Waal, I reckon not. No such skunks as you and Ben Black are agoin' to search me, not if I know it."

"As you like!" hissed Black. "Otten, put the old woman inside and lock the door. We'll see if the old fool won't do as I ask him."

Otten forced the poor woman into the house, and then put the key on the outside of the door and locked it.

Mrs. Valleo glanced hurriedly around, and, seeing no trace of Mary, breathed a sigh of relief.

"She has escaped, thank heaven," she murmured, espying an open window in the rear, "and she is free from that villain's clutches. Pray heaven she may bring help, for I fear we may need it now if ever we did."

"Now, then, you meddlesome old fool," hissed Black, drawing a pistol, "give me the papers."

"Never!" cried Vet.

"Now then, upon him, Otten," cried Black and in a moment the two scoundrels had flung themselves on the old man and forced him to the ground."

Otten seized him by the throat, and Black, holding a pistol to his throat, thrust his hand into the inner pocket of the old man's coat and drew forth a packet of papers.

"At last!" he cried, triumphantly, as he hurriedly glanced over them, "mine, mine, at last!"

He thrust the papers into his pocket and said:

"Let him up, Otten. The old fool can't hurt us, and I don't want to kill him."

"Yer cowardly coyote," muttered Vet, as he arose to his feet, "it took two of yer to do it, but never you mind, Ben Black, there'll come a day of reckonin' for you some day and then you'll remember what I tell yer now. The mark of death is on yer and you're a doomed man just as sure as I stand here."

"Silence!" roared Black. "Open the door, Otten, and put the old fool inside. I've got the papers, and that's enough."

Otten opened the door, pointed his pistol at Vet and said:

"Go in there and don't talk so much. Come, move quick, or I'll have to make you."

"You'll both on yer move quicker'n yer ever done afore many days," muttered Vet as he went in. "Mark what I say, Ben Black. If the bullets ain't cast what's to end yer evil life, I'm very much mistaken. Yer time is short, Ben Black, and —"

With a cry of rage the outlaw dashed against the door, slammed it into place, turned the key and hurried away as the sun sank from sight in the west.

"I reckon it's time you settled with me, ain't it, Ben?" asked Otten, when they were well away from the place.

"What do you mean?" hissed Black.

"You promised me five thousand dollars for going in with yer on that note business."

"Well, I can't pay you now," was the surly answer.

"Yes, you can, and you must," said Otten bluntly.

"Must?" hissed Black.

"Yes, must. You've got the money, and I want it."

"I tell you I'll give it to you, but not to-day," returned Black impatiently. "Can't you wait?"

"I've been waiting," was the reply. "Well, if you don't settle up, I know where I can raise a thousand dollars, anyhow."

"What do you mean?" muttered Black.

"By giving information as to your whereabouts. Maybe you don't know there's a reward of a thousand dollars offered for you, dead or alive."

"When did you learn this?" hissed Black, the color mounting to his face.

"Two days ago."

"And you said nothing?"

"No."

"And now you mean to betray me to the soldiers, do you?" demanded Black angrily.

"That's about the size of it," said Otten coolly, "that is, unless you make up your mind to settle up with me without any——"

Black interrupted him with an oath and a hoarse cry of rage, as he suddenly sprang upon him, a long knife in his hand.

"No, you don't!" hissed Otten, throwing up his hand in which there gleamed a pistol. "Two can play at that game, Mr. Ben Black."

"Curse you!" growled Black, slowly retreating as the muzzle of his pistol was raised to the level of his eyes.

"I've had enough of you, Ben Black," said Otten, "and if I get a chance I'm going to turn over a new leaf. I'm tired of living on the misery of others. I want to be able to sleep sound of a night and not start at every noise and think my life's in danger."

"Oh, you do, eh?" laughed Black, scornfully. "So you mean to reform, do you? And you were going to begin it by informing on me to the soldiers and getting the reward? Bah! you don't intend to reform any more than I do."

"Well, give me what you said you would and let me go," growled Otten. "I want to skip the country. Nobody wants me here and it ain't safe fer me ter stay."

"No!" said Black. "You tried to bluff me and now you get nothing. If you had stood by me you would have got something, but now——"

"That's a lie, Ben Black," hissed Otten. "Yer never intended to pay me. You just wanted to make me yer tool. You never told the truth in yer life. Yer lied about Mrs. Valleo, yer lied to Mary, you are a lie yourself and the truth isn't in you."

Black darted an angry look at the man who dared to speak these unwelcome truths, and his fingers twitched as he held his knife in his hand, ready to spring upon the other at the first opportunity.

Otten slowly retreated, his weapon still leveled at Black's head.

"I've done with you, Ben Black," he said. "Good-night."

In an instant he had plunged into the thicket and was gone. Ben Black put his fingers to his lips and blew a peculiar whistle which could be heard to a great distance.

In a few moments an Indian glided out into the path and said:

"My brother called me?"

"Yes," hissed Black. "Otten is a traitor, follow on his trail, his scalp is yours if you take it. Remember, let him not escape, and I will give you rich presents."

"Ugh!" grunted the savage, as he bent his face to the ground and then set off in the direction taken by Otten.

"Wardcloud will soon settle him," muttered Black, "and one more traitor is disposed of. One by one my friends desert me, and a price is set upon my life, but still I will not flinch, and if die I must, it will be with colors flying, game to the last."

He listened for several minutes, and then hearing nothing, muttered:

"But one path leads to the house. I must make a bold stand, and fortune is with my gun. I must sell these papers at once for a large sum, as possible to men who will take them on speculation, and then leave the country forever. I have given a decent price, and the odds have been against me, but I have not set out all, and Ben Black is worth a dozen dead men yet."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FATE OF THE OLD CHIEF.

When Mary fled from the cabin of old Vet to escape the hateful clutches of Ben Black, it was her intention to make her way to the settlement and remain there until Lew returned.

In her haste, however, she lost her way, and presently found herself wandering about the mountains with no definite idea as to where she was going.

The sun went down, darkness came on, she lost the path and soon realized that she could neither retrace her steps to the cabin nor find the settlement.

After trying for some time to set herself right, she had found the path again and was about to proceed in what she considered the way to the settlement, when she suddenly heard voices.

They were those of Ben Black and Otten, and the men were coming her way.

In an instant she fled in the opposite direction, making all haste to put as wide a space as possible between herself and Ben Black.

She did not pause until she was ready to faint with exhaustion, leaning against a tree by the side of the path while she panted for breath.

The moon presently arose, and she was about to proceed, when she heard a light footstep in front of her and shrank back in terror.

"Do not fear me, white maiden," said a pleasant voice. "I am Fawn, the daughter of the great chief Ogalalla, the friend of the palefaces."

"Ah, yes, I remember it was at your village where my mother stopped when our house was burned down. I know you to be good and kind and I do not fear you. I am escaping from the villain Ben Black, and when I heard your step I thought it was he."

"You are the sister of the brave young white chief, Lightning Lew. He saved the Fawn's life, and she will never forget."

"Yes, he is my brother. You have seen him, you will take me to him?"

"I will take you to the village, no harm shall come to you," said the Indian girl. "Ben Black bad man, he will not come to Ogalalla; you will be safe."

"You are good and kind, Fawn, and I will go with you. Come, let us hasten. I would not have Ben Black see me for the world."

"Ben Black has a cruel heart and a false tongue—his words are lies! Many of our braves follow him on the warpath, and now the fire on the hearth will no more burn for them. Ben Black told them lies; he said they would drive out the palefaces, and now the women weep for them in the empty wigwam. Let not Ben Black come to Ogalalla's camp, for my father is angry at him for taking away his young men. Come, let us go."

The Indian girl now led the way, and in about an hour the camp was reached and Mary found a shelter at last.

Toward morning she was awakened by some unusual stir in the village, and, creeping to the opening of her tent, she looked out:

"Do not make noise," said the voice of Fawn at her side. "Bad man come to village, bad paleface, bad Indian. Fawn has fear for paleface maiden."

"Bad white men have come to the village?" repeated Mary. "Who are they, do you know?"

At this moment a campfire near the tent suddenly blazed up brightly, and by its fierce light Mary saw the man she most hated and feared come out into the open space surrounded by the tents.

With him were a dozen or more savages and two or three white men, all inflamed with drink and evil passions, and all ready to do the slightest bidding of the outlaw who led them.

The old chief now came out of his tent and, advancing slowly and with great dignity towards the group, said angrily:

"Why has Ben Black, the outlaw and renegade, come to the village of Ogalalla? What do you seek here, evil man? This is no place for you, you who have lied to my young men, you whose hand is stained with the blood of the old and feeble, you whose name is a reproach."

"Ogalalla is an old man!" sneered Black. "Warcloud is chief of the tribe. He is a great chief, he does not fear to

lead the young men to battle, he does not talk, he acts. Warriors, behold Warcloud, your chief. Do not listen to the words of this foolish old woman."

Warcloud had been promised the leadership of the tribe by Ben Black and the man's vanity had been fed at every opportunity till now he felt himself to be the greatest warrior in the land.

The soldiers had succeeded in driving many of the savages from their hiding-places and these, under the name of Ben Black, had now returned to the village.

Many of those who had joined the rebels were there besides others, greatly outnumbering those who had remained true to the whites.

At a signal from Ben Black, two score warriors now joined him and he cried aloud:

"Behold your chief, Warcloud!"

"Warcloud, great chief!" they all shouted.

Ogalalla threw aside his blankets, seized a knife from a belt of a man near him and cried:

"Warcloud is a dog, a wolf, a false-hearted traitor. Ogalalla spits upon him and upon Ben Black, the lying-tongued, red-handed viper."

"Curse you!" hissed Black, drawing a revolver. "we will see whose voice carries most authority with it. Take that, you chattering old idiot!"

There was a flash, a report, a single cry of pain, and the old chief fell upon his face dead, shot through the heart by the renegade, murdered at his own hearthstone.

The Indian girl uttered a wild cry and dashed out of the tent while Mary, overcome with the horror of the scene, fell to the ground insensible.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PREPARING FOR FLIGHT—ON THE ALERT.

Ben Black was in possession of the Indian village, and his word was law.

Warcloud was the nominal chief, but Black moved him as a man moves puppets, and the savage was merely a tool in the hands of the renegade.

Mary's presence in the camp had been soon discovered by Black, and the poor girl was now a prisoner, with no hope of escape.

It was Ben Black's intention to desert the men he had led and to make his escape from the country, but at the same time he must appear to be heart and soul with them, and to be looking after their interests alone.

He cared nothing for them now, and saw that he would only lose by remaining with them and so, selfish to the last, he thought only of his own safety and meant to lose no time in getting away.

Although he knew it not, his time was short and he would need to hasten indeed if he would avoid the retribution that was rapidly drawing near.

Old Vet, hurrying to the settlement after leaving Mrs. Vallee in a place of safety, had given the alarm, and there were many who were eager to claim the reward offered for Ben Black, dead or alive.

Otten had escaped the fate intended for him by Black, and he, too, was among the number of his enemies and one not to be despised.

Fawn, the Indian girl, had not been seen since the murder of the old chief, but if Black had known her better he would have known that she would avenge her father's death even at the cost of her own life, and that, go where he would, she would ever be on his track.

There was need of haste, indeed, for Lightning Lew had sworn to kill the man upon sight, and he would keep his word so sure as he met his father's murderer.

The Indians had been driven from their fastnesses, many had been killed and many taken captive, and Lew was now returning to the settlement with Dan.

He was still at some little distance from it, there being yet a few hours of daylight when he met Otten.

The boy was about to draw his pistol when the man threw up his hand and cried:

"Don't shoot, Lew, don't shoot! I know I ain't done right, but I'm goin' to do better if I can. I've got news for you."

"Well, what is it?"

"Ben Black and his Indians have seized Ogalalla's camp, the old chief is dead, and your sister Mary has been taken again."

"Mary again a prisoner in the hands of Ben Black!" muttered Lew. "Heaven save her!"

"Yes, and there's worse news. Ben Black has got the papers you left with old Vet. He means to leave the country,

and he's only staying with the Injuns till he gets away safely."

"You have fallen out with him?" asked Lew.

"Yes. He put an Injan on my track and told him not to let me go any place; but I had a gun and the Injan didn't, and the odds were too many for him. After that I heard what had happened, and I thought I'd better make tracks."

"Come," cried Lew, "there is no time to be lost. We must hurry on to the Indian village. Mr. Otten, if you really wish to help me, get on to the front and bring a detachment of soldiers. I must go on at once. Come, Dan, if you are going with me."

"I'll do it," cried Otten.

Lew left the road and struck off across country at once, the path being as plain to him as though it had been a high road.

Night fell before he reached the village of Ogalalla, but the darkness was in his favor, as he was able to reconnoiter the camp without being discovered.

He did not see Mary or Ben Black and he feared that the villain had escaped.

"I must get into the camp somehow," he said, upon returning to where he had left Dan. "I can learn nothing out here."

"Why don't you walk boldly in thin and ax 'em in yer sister there?" replied Dan.

"That wouldn't work, Dan," laughed Lew. "I should be sure to—Sh!"

Lew dropped to the ground, pulling Dan after him.

Then he heard a grunt and the outline of a savage was suddenly seen within a few feet of them.

With the swiftness of thought Lew suddenly sprang up, leaped upon the Indian and bore him to the ground.

"Not a word or you are a dead man!" he hissed, clapping his hand over the fellow's mouth and pressing the pistol to his head.

Dan was at his side in an instant, and the man was first disarmed and gagged, and then stripped of his clothes, which Lew put on.

The young scout then darkened his face and hands by rubbing mud and earth upon them, put on the Indian's feathered head-dress and looked like a perfect savage.

The Indian was bound, gagged and hidden away in the bush where he could not possibly be seen or be able to give an alarm, and then Lew boldly entered the village, Dan remaining on the outside.

Some of the savages spoke to the boy scout, but he answered only with a grunt, and passed on.

In the center of the space before the tents a stake had been driven into the ground, and on three sides of it were piled beams of brushwood, all ready for the torch.

He looked for Black, and, not seeing him, stretched himself out before a fire not far from the stake, and pretended to go to sleep.

He waited for an hour, during which time he saw two horses brought out and made ready for a journey, being then tethered to a tree near the edge of the village.

At last an Indian came hurriedly into camp, stopped before one of the tents, and spoke a few words in an excited tone.

Ben Black came from the tent in an instant, muttering to himself:

"So soon? That fellow Otten must have given the alarm after all. Curse that blooming Indian for not killing him!"

The man looked around him, listened for a moment, and then calling the Indian to his side, said:

"Bring out the prisoner, and be quick about it!"

The savage went away, and presently returned, bringing Mary with him, her arms bound behind her back.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A JUST RETRICTION.

"Do you still persist in your refusal to go with me?" asked Black as Mary was brought forward.

"Yes!" cried the brave girl. "Rather death than that."

"Then be it death!" cried Black. "To the stake with her!"

Several Indians sprang to their feet and Mary was led to the stake.

"Now the deed!" shouted the renegade.

"No!" cried Lew, bounding forward, felling two or three of the savages and cutting the cords that bound Mary by a few rapid strokes of his knife.

"Who are you?"

"Lightning Lew!" cried the boy scout. "Now then, Ben Black, it is a life for a life!"

The outlaw drew his knife as Lew leaped upon him and then began the fiercest combat the savages had ever witnessed.

It was seen from the start that it could end only with the death of one or both of the fighters, but no one attempted to interfere in the slightest.

Back and forth, around and around the combatants circled, both watching for the slightest advantage, both on the alert to strike the blow which would end the fight.

The Indians sat or stood around watching the fight with the keenest interest, yet doing nothing that could give either of the duelists the least advantage.

There was scarcely a man there but hated Ben Black, and would have been glad to see him killed, but the young scout had given the watch a chance for his life and they would not interfere.

Black presently saw that if the fight continued he must inevitably perish, for Lew was as determined as a bloodhound and had right on his side, but there might be some mishap and so the villain fought on for his life, watching for any chance, no matter how slight, which would throw the balance upon his side.

At last, after ten minutes of the most determined fighting, Black's knife was only broke in half and fell to the ground.

In an instant, before Lew could dart forward, a lithe form sprang between him and the outlaw, there was a gleam of light like a flash from a musket and Ben Black fell to the ground pierced to the heart.

Above him stood Fawn, the Indian girl, holding a flaring knife in her hand.

"Life for life!" she cried. "The paleface killed my father, he is mine. Lightning Lew is brave; he fights like a warrior, but this man's life belonged to me."

Ben Black was dead, and, after all, his blood was not upon Lew's hand.

The Indians, now that Black was dead, suddenly bethought themselves that Lew was one of their most determined foes, and that more than one of them had sworn to have his scalp.

With a simultaneous yell, a score of painted savages arose to their feet and rushed upon him.

At that moment there was a yell and then a cheer as Dan, Otten, old Vet and a score of brave soldier lads suddenly rushed into the opening.

"Down with the red devils!" shouted Dan. "Don't give them any quarter! Hooroo for ould Ireland!"

There was a volley, and then the soldiers closed in upon the foe, and a hand-to-hand fight began.

Those who could seek safety in flight, the rest perished, and in a few moments the fight was over.

It was then discovered that Otten had been killed by a blow from a tomahawk, so that although he died in the defense of his own people, his evil deeds had at last found him out and the justice of heaven was satisfied.

The Indians were driven from that part of the country, and the uprising was at an end, the malcontents having gained nothing.

Lew returned to the settlement with Mary, Dan and Vet, and after having been through many troubles and trials began now to reap his reward.

The title deeds were recovered from the body of the dead outlaw, and by them Colonel Valleo's claim to the land he had occupied was fully established.

The farm increased greatly in value as time went on, a new and substantial dwelling was erected upon the site of the old cabin, and where once was the little settlement there is now a prosperous town.

Dan Rafferty remained in California, married and settled down, and to day he is one of the bonanza kings of the West, but through it all he still remains the firm friend of Lightning Lew.

Mrs. Valleo and old Vet lived until within a few years ago and died beloved and respected by all who knew them, Mrs. Valleo's property being left jointly to Mary and Lew.

Mary in time forgot the sad experiences through which she had been, and finally married a man who loved her devotedly and whom she could live in return so that in time the terrible incidents of those few months became but a memory.

Lewis Redmond is now one of the wealthiest and most popular men in California, happily married, prosperous in business and as true to a friend as in the old days when he was known as the Boy Scout.

Next week's issue will contain "THE GRAY HOUSE ON THE ROCK; OR, THE GHOSTS OF BALLENTYNE HALL."

INTERESTING ARTICLES

BUNCH OF KEYS STOPS SHOT AND SAVES LIFE.

Joy Holmes, Rock Island agent at Goodland, Kan., owes his life to a bunch of keys he carried in his vest pocket. As Holmes was reaching into a drawer for a pair of gloves, in some manner his revolver went off. The bullet struck the keys in his vest pocket and stopped. The only injury Holmes received was a slight bruise from one of the keys being pushed into the flesh.

THE FIRST BICYCLE.

From the best accounts, it appears that the first bicycle—meaning by the term a two-wheeled machine for human locomotion—was made in France about the year 1815. This pioneer machine was a very awkward affair, consisting of a couple of heavy wooden wheels of equal diameter, one behind the other, and joined together by a longitudinal wooden bar, on which the rider's seat was fixed, the mode of propulsion being the pushing of the feet against the ground. Not for fifty years was any real progress made. In 1869 the machine with the big driving wheel with the little hind wheel was invented by Michaux, of Paris, and a few years later came the "safety," which, with many improvements, is the machine we have to-day.

THREE YOLKS IN EGG.

John Henry Dickson is the proudest negro in Uniontown, Pa. "Dixie," as he is known to hundreds of persons here, is a chicken fancier extraordinary, and for three years has conducted experiments in feeding his fowls that would drive Luther Burbank crazy. His feed formulae are a carefully cherished secret, and are designed to produce multiple yolk eggs.

Last summer his hens began to lay double yolkers fairly regularly, but recently the ambition of his life was realized.

He found a triple-yolked egg in the nest of his favorite hen. The egg weighs seven and one-half ounces and is pure white in color. "Dixie" claims that by 1920 he will have four-yolked eggs regularly.

ANOTHER GERMAN MONOPOLY BROKEN.

The return of Alsace and Lorraine to France renders it possible now for the Allies to break up the world monopoly on potash, the essential ingredient for agricultural fertilizers, which Germany has enjoyed to date, and which led several years before the war to a serious diplomatic incident between the United States and Germany.

The existence in upper Alsace of vast deposits of potash has been known for years, but the Germans, in order to further the development of their potash

fields along the Rhine discouraged as much as possible the development of those in Alsace, in order to limit the world's production and keep up the price of the German product. The potash fields of Alsace and Lorraine, which under the control of the French Government will now enter into world-wide competition, are of an extent almost incalculable. The latest estimates made by competent engineers are that the mines, of which fifteen are already in operation, yielding from thirty to forty carloads of potash a day, will not be exhausted in less than 400 years.

NEW THINGS.

A new brush for automobiles can be attached to a vacuum cleaner to get dust its bristles will not ordinarily remove.

* * *

A novel beet harvesting machine loosens the earth from around the roots as it is drawn over a field and sharp points carried on a wheel penetrate them and carry them to a conveyor.

* * *

An Australian inventor's windmill for generating electricity is featured by a specially designed low-speed dynamo, while the mill has two wheels in tandem, the foremost being the smaller.

* * *

A process for the purification of waste water with colloidal clay and milk of lime has been developed by a French chemist.

* * *

An adjustable table enables a new tapping machine to tap holes in work at any angle.

* * *

The German village of Remborn has a linden tree which is said to be more than 1,200 years old.

* * *

Oil burning equipment has been invented for use with steam or hot water residence heating plants.

* * *

It has been discovered that bars of pure silver, heated and left in a magnetic field a few hours, become permanently magnetized.

* * *

An English inventor has designed a portable vacuum cleaner that also can be used as a seat, table, cabinet, music stool or pedestal.

* * *

An English scientist has developed a fuel made from household refuse, including ashes, paper and vegetable matter, ground into powder and compressed into briquets, which are impregnated with oil-tar and pitch.

GOOD READING

BURIED GOLD IN POLAND.

A colossal amount of gold and silver lies hidden in Polish soil, according to latest arrivals here from Warsaw. It was placed there by peasants and landowners when the German invasion began.

Much of the buried treasure was lost when Germans cleared Poland's woods. Marked trees, used to designate the location of the precious buried metal, were chopped down and taken to Germany to be used in making airplanes. Then they blew up the stumps.

The Poles obtained the gold when the Russians began their retreat before the German onslaught. As they left they paid the Poles in gold and silver for supplies. When the Germans came they proceeded to seize all the gold and silver, but they no more than got a start when it all seemed to miraculously disappear.

PIGS GOT DRUNK.

Reports that a herd of pigs was acting in an unseemly manner on a hog ranch near Auburn, Wash., led to an investigation by county authorities and Federal sleuths, who are trailing liquor law violators. The porkers were found to be in an intoxicated condition, some of the herd being close to the stage when cerise striped zebras, azure blue baboons and Nine-green ant-eaters might have caused unrest in the pens.

The condition of the herd was found to have been due to the pigs having been fed vast quantities of rice and corn liquor mash, which had been dumped from vats when an adjoining farm had been raided, when Japanese were found to be operating a whiskey still in a wholesale manner.

A veterinary was summoned to assist the pigs through the hangover stage.

CANE HANDLES.

Most of the handles of canes, alpenstocks, parasols and umbrellas used in France are grown in nurseries. Ash, maple, oak, chestnut, and other woods are used. In the early part of the first year after planting the young trees are cut near the ground to bring about the formation of numerous sprouts. The lower branches are removed and only a plume of leaves is left. Early in the spring the sprouts are subjected to a surgical operation; their bark is cut and the wood is carved in different designs, which are swollen by the sap and grow in high relief as the tree develops. Special instruments are used for the cutting and designing. Thus carved, the sprouts grow for three years. At the end of the third year the forest of umbrella handles is cut, and the cuts are dried in the sun and then given a vapor bath, after which they are put into the hands of skilled workmen, who peel them with one quick movement. When skinned, the peelers cut them to

the required length and send them to the umbrella maker, who varnishes them. If the shape desired is a ring or other open form, a ring or oval or square is grafted to the natural stalk, bound closely, and left to grow into place.

ROLLING BOILERS 21 MILES.

Over a year and a half ago, the passenger steamer "Bear" was wrecked along the coast of northern California, and six 45-ton boilers were salvaged from the wreck. It was planned to tow these boilers to Eureka, Cal., but after a number of attempts to do this had failed, it was decided to roll the boilers along the beach for a distance of 21 miles to Humboldt Bay. Each boiler weighed 45 tons, and was 12 feet in length and 13.8 feet in diameter. The work involved clearing a road along the rocky beach. In two places rivers had to be crossed. At the Bear River crossing, the boilers were rolled through a ford, while at the Eel River crossing, they were loaded on a barge and towed for two miles to a point where the rolling process could be continued. When the boilers reached Humboldt Bay they were loaded on a barge and towed to the wharf in Eureka.

WHAT BECOMES OF THE MILK BOTTLES?

The average milk bottle makes only seventeen trips before it is broken or lost.

For every consumer who has a quart of milk delivered at the door each day, the dealer in the course of a year has to supply twenty new bottles.

This is the report made by dairy experts of the Department of Agriculture, who have just completed an investigation of the staggering waste of millions of milk bottles annually.

The investigation, conducted in eighty-six cities, shows that the average milk dealer buys 17,649 new bottles a month and the large dealers buy more than 90,000 a month, which are largely, though not entirely, replacement stock.

In sixteen of the cities investigated, more than 8,000,000 sound milk bottles are collected annually from the city dumps, the specialists report. In some cities the business carried on by junk dealers is one of the most serious sources of milk bottle losses, they say. Not only do they sell the bottles to dealers in the city, but often ship them to other towns. Most States have no laws restricting such traffic.

Only thirty-three cities had milk bottle exchanges, or places where milk bottles from all sources are sorted out and returned to the owner, provided he is a member of the exchange.

Nineteen States have regulations governing the use of milk bottles, the report concludes, and seventy-two cities reported the use by dealers of other dealers' bottles.

FROM ALL POINTS

INDIANS DRINK "PEYOTE."

"Peyote"—no relation to opium—is causing State and Government officials in the Cass Lake Indian district of Minnesota a great deal of trouble and worry. The reservation is "bone-dry." Peyote is a liquor officially listed as poisonous. Indian Agents C. E. Benson and W. J. Johnson say it is the "hottest, wildest booze that ever gurgled down the throat of a human being." It has been barred from the mails.

Despite secrecy in distilling the liquor Government agents are said to have discovered that a Mexican plant is used in the manufacture. The plant is believed to be brewed with grapes ordinarily used in making moonshine whiskey. Mrs. Frank Boboling and Mrs. Joe Beltracchi became seriously ill after taking a swallow of the fiery stuff, according to a reservation report.

TIMBER WOLVES WORKING HAVOC AMONG THE HERDS.

Timber wolves are working havoc among the caribou herds around Lake Athapapuskow, 100 miles north of the Pas, the present northern terminus of the Canadian National Railway. Trappers and hunters report that the caribou are being slaughtered by the hundred.

The caribou are accustomed to swarm into the Lake Athapapuskow region every summer to pasture on the rich grass that carpets the forests and swamp lands. They usually withdraw at the approach of cold weather into the barrens of the Far North, where they winter immune in a country free from wolves. They delayed their northward migration this year because of the mild temperatures that have prevailed on their southern feeding grounds, and, caught in the heavy recent snows, they have fallen easy prey to the wolves.

VICTORY BUTTONS.

The War Department announces, under date of April 14, 1919, in Circular No. 187, the following information regarding the issue of Victory Buttons: "A lapel button to be known as the Victory Button, for wear on civilian clothes, will be issued to all officers, enlisted men (excluding members of the Students' Army Training Corps), field clerks, and members of the Army Nurse Corps, who served honorably on active duty in the Army of the United States for a period of fifteen days at any time between April 6, 1917, and Nov. 11, 1918. The button will be of silver for those wounded in action, and bronze for all others. For the present, the Victory Button will be issued at time of honorable discharge to those entitled to it and to those who have already been honorably discharged. Later,

the button will be issued to all remaining in service entitled to it. Those who have been discharged before a supply of buttons was available for issue may secure a button by mailing to the supply officer of the nearest military post, camp or station, including a recruiting station, their original discharge certificate or a true copy thereof prepared on the form provided for the purpose, or, in the case of officers to whom no discharge certificate was issued, their discharge order or a true copy thereof. The true copy of a discharge certificate or of a discharge order must be accepted by a civil officer empowered to administer oaths and be a full, literal and complete copy of the original and contain all written or printed matter appearing on both sides of the discharge certificate or discharge order."

ONE THOUSAND BILLION LOCUSTS.

One thousand billion of 'em will be here in a couple of weeks.

Great swarms of 17-year locusts, released from nearly two decades of sound slumber, will swoop through the air for a month or so, infecting field, orchard and forest, and then will die.

Professor Raymond C. Osburn of the department of entomology at Ohio State University, and government scientists predict that the periodical visit of the locust swarm will be made some time in May.

"It depends a great deal on the temperature," Prof. Osburn said. "If it gets really warm the locusts will appear sooner."

The cicada septendecim is a wonderful creature. For 17 long years it sleeps in dark holes in the earth—then comes to life. Its visits are tabulated with accuracy by entomologists, and farmers and horticulturists have been warned of the onslaught.

There should be no occasion for unusual alarm, however, at the appearance of the locust swarms, Prof. Osburn declared. Little damage will result if proper precautions are taken.

The chief injury the insect is capable of is killing young fruit trees. The locust chisels grooves in the branches of trees to deposit eggs. Young trees, the Ohio State scientist warned, should be protected with screens and netting, and the visit of the cicada will pass by almost unnoticed.

The government map shows that the cicada will appear this year in the greatest numbers in the following States:

Ohio, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Georgia, New York, Illinois, Michigan, Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina and Vermont.

During the last appearance of the cicada a number of persons experimented with them as food, and it is said that palatable dishes resulted.

LUCKY JOE BROWN

—OR—

THE SMARTEST BOY IN NEW YORK

By J. P. RICHARDS

(A serial story)

CHAPTER XIII (Continued).

As he spoke he blew the lamp out, and the place was in darkness.

Jack Kling then removed the board and crawled out.

He was back again in a minute.

"Yair; it's him," he said. "Do we do business wit' him to-night?"

"Sure," replied Sandy.

"Hadn't we better put de blinders on de Rube?"

"No, no! Rube's all right. We've started wit' him, and we may as well go de hull figger—see. Stand over dere in de corner, Rube!"

Joe wondered what was coming, for all the boys got into the corner.

It was only that Sandy wanted to lift up two of the floor boards.

Beneath was a shallow hole, and the lamp, which had been lighted again, striking down into it, revealed further secrets.

The hole was full of plunder stolen by these boys.

There were many articles of brass and copper, and some rough metal.

Among other things Joe noted lead pipe, two small bales of rope, a keg of nails, a lot of new tools, and so on.

The hole was well filled with anything and everything these young rascals could get their hands on, it seemed.

Jack Kling crawled out again, and Sandy, descending into the hole, began to pass out the lead pipe and the rough pieces of brass and copper.

Denny Butler received these and passed them through the pipe to Jack.

When all the rough metal had been removed, Sandy closed the hole.

"Say, you fellers do business wholesale," said Joe. "I only wish I could come in on this lay."

"You're comin', I tell yer," replied Sandy. "We only come here to-night to do business wit' dis here Italian; after dat we've got a job on hand where we can use you—see? If you make good you're one of us from dis on."

"Are there any more of you?"

"Two more. Dey hain't round to-night. Hold on, Rube. We'll give you a chanst to show whether yer anny good or not, an' dat pretty quick."

Jack Kling son returned with three one-dollar bills and some silver change in his hand.

"Is dat all he would give for all dat stuff?" cried Sandy.

"Dat's all," replied Jack.

"Yer lie! You've swiped some of de mun."

"No, I hain't, neither! Honest I hain't," protested Jack.

But his protest did him but little good, for Sandy and the Butler boy went for him, and in spite of the fight he put up, tumbled him over on the floor and went through his pockets, where, sure enough, a dollar and a half turned up.

"Dat's mine," whined Jack. "You leave that be."

"Aw, you make me tired," growled Sandy. "It's de last time you'll be let deal wit' de man, an' don't yer forget it."

They then let up on Jack, and Sandy, who seemed to be boss, proceeded to divide the money, Jack getting his share.

No more was said about the matter after that.

Supper came next, and when that was over Sandy announced that they were about to shut up shop and get down to business.

"We are goin' to frisk a high-toned joint to-night, Rube," he said. "First time we ever tried a ting like dat, but we've got de chanst, and we are going to make de most of it. If it pulls off de way I t'ink it will it's going to be a big t'ing."

Joe asked no questions, but contented himself with such talk as a simple-minded country boy of crooked tendencies would be likely to make.

The boys now vacated the hiding-hole, and shut up the entrance.

"You just follow us, Rube, and say nothing," ordered Sandy.

They rode back to the plaza and then struck up Bedford avenue, which street crossing South Ninth Joe had seen before.

At last they came to a house from which the front had been removed.

Indeed, the whole house seemed to be in process of being made over.

Next door was a fine double house, which looked as if it might be the residence of some wealthy man.

There was a doctor's sign on the door, but it was too dark for Joe to read the name.

Entrance to the house, which was being rebuilt, was guarded by a rough board fence in which there was a gate secured by a padlock.

"Look out for de bulis now," whispered Sandy.

"Bulls? Do they keep bulls in here?" asked Joe.

"Huh, greeney! Cops, den, if you like dat better."

"Oh!"

"Shut yer head. Don't talk nor ask questions."

They leaned against the fence in silence for several minutes, looking up and down the avenue.

Then no sign of a policeman being discovered, Sandy turned his attention to the gate.

Producing a strong pair of cutting pliers, he attacked the staple which held the padlock.

The pliers had been specially sharpened, it would seem, for in a very few minutes Sandy had cut through the staple and had the padlock out.

(To be continued).

AFTER BLACK DIAMONDS

OR

THE BOYS OF COAL SHAFT NO. 3

By WILLIAM WADE

(A Serial Story)

CHAPTER XI (Continued).

Jane and Emily had turned to see the men helping the three who had been caught by the explosion to the car, and only Will Merlin, who happened to be watching the resuscitation of Etta, saw this proceeding.

"Is she all right, Newton?" roughly asked the son of the operator, as he stepped close to the young lady and stooped over her.

"Etta! Etta! Are you feeling all right?" he asked.

The girl opened her eyes and turned them to Merlin, did not speak, but looked past him to Newton, and said:

"Put some more water on my forehead—Bob."

Will, now red with a feeling of chagrin or anger, got to his feet and allowed young Newton to get past him to apply a little more water to the girl's forehead.

"Can you get up—little girl?" asked Robert, his lips close to her ear.

"Yes—Bob! Help me up!" she answered, very slowly.

To her feet he lifted her, and found that she was not very weak from the effects of the gas at all.

Merlin had walked away, and was standing at the side of the car, watching the men rubbing the wrists of the three men, and bringing them back to consciousness.

"How are they coming?" asked Newton, coming across the narrow track. "Are they all right?"

"Coming all right!" answered Norcross, who was working hard over the body of Stanton, the miner, while other men were working over the operator and the other miner.

"This fellow has been drinking! He'll be a long time getting around! He's drunk!" muttered Norcross, becoming disgusted after having brought Stanton almost to the point of opening his eyes several times and having failed.

Robert picked his way around the car and examined the miner.

"Let him go! He's drunk! Drunk as a fool! He's all right otherwise!" he cried, swinging his hand in a severe slap against the man's face.

"Ugh!" grunted Stanton, opening his eyes quickly and trying to sit up.

"That shows he's all right, excepting drunk!" said Robert, turning now to the others.

"Fellows, we'll have to fix a way of getting out of here now!" he said to the miners. "We're caught

down here. By the way, are those flames cut off? I don't see any reflection!"

They had forgotten completely about the fire down in the main west entry in the attempt to save these men!

That is often the way. Men forget their own dangers when others are in trouble.

One of the younger miners, whose lamp was burning, leaped away from the little crowd, and hurried to the other end of the entry.

Then his lamp was lifted off his head, and the crowd saw it flickering and moving up and down as a thin voice came back to them:

"No fire in sight! The whole thing's caved in!"

"Thank goodness for that!" muttered several of the old miners.

"How are we going to get out of here? We're penned in, with two blow-downs between us and the shaft! There aint no way out of here to Spring-side, 'cause we're west of the entry going that way!"

This was a fact—a fact which Robert Newton knew as well as any of the others. They had blown the west entry closed in order to stop the fire on the other side, and now they had no way out.

"Well, we're in better shape than before we blew that entry in," answered Newton. "The fire can't get to us now—the chances are that it'll be put out because it'll rage up that air-flume and destroy it, and then have to die for want of air."

"But no one can reach us from the shaft, Bob!" answered one of the older miners. "There's no telling how much rock you blew down into that entry."

"Then we'll have to wait for them to come through!" answered Robert.

"Great Lord, boy, do you know how long that'll take?" asked the old coal digger. And then he answered his own question: "It'll be three days at the very best, if you brought down much of that rock. You see, we don't know how much of that entry was blowed in by the explosion!"

The girls stood silent, fearful, awe-struck. Here they were, face to face with death, standing beside each other in an hour when death was almost certain, so far as cold reasoning was concerned.

"Think they'll come right at the work?" asked Robert.

"We don't know! Suppose that fire's burning on the other side of the first cave-in, like it was on this side! They'll have to get their fire out before they can try to get to us!"

"And there's a great big chance that the shaft shaft is completely gone right now!" answered Newton.

"That's a fact!" came the answer from several of the miners.

In the dim light of the small oil-lamps which flickered and sputtered on the caps of the miners, they stood here, hundreds of feet below the surface of the ground, and talked of the chances for escape.

(To be continued.)

PLUCK AND LUCK

NEW YORK, MAY 28, 1919.

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GOOD CURRENT NEWS ARTICLES

While making an excavation on his farm in Bald Eagle Township, Pa., and after digging through hard, red clay to a depth of eight feet, Harry Eldred came upon two good-sized toads in a small pocket in the clay. On being exposed to the air, the "hoppers" became quite lively. No one ever heard of toads wintering under the ground to such a depth, and Farmer Eldred is greatly puzzled to know how the toads got there and how they managed to live. The facts are vouched for by Farmer Eldred.

The smallest republic is not San Marino, as usually supposed, but the diminutive island Tavolara, about 7½ miles off the coast of Sardinia. This island is only 1 1-5 miles wide, and its whole population numbers but 55. In 1836 Tavolara was granted independence by Carl Albert, and a certain Barteleoni assumed the title of king under the name of Paul I. At his death in May, 1882, he expressed the wish that the people should become self-reigning. In 1886 the Tavolarians proclaimed the republic, and according to their constitution, a president is elected every ten years.

The first message to be carried by a length of wire, with the human voice as a medium, was in 1876. From his room in the upper story of a board-house at Boston, Alexander Graham Bell telephoned to his assistant, Thomas F. Watson, on the floor below: "Mr. Watson, come here; I want you." That first telephone was adapted only to sending from one end of the line, so Watson's reply was to rush up the stairs, shouting triumphantly: "I heard you." It was a moment of joy for the inventor and his co-worker, but they still had many obstacles to overcome. In the same year Bell and Watson carried on a conversation over a two-mile wire between Boston and Cambridge. At the Philadelphia Exposition that year Bell exhibited a crude model of his telephone, but it attracted little interest.

Secretary of War Baker arrived in Paris on April 15 and gave to the Associated Press a statement as to the War Department's program for the return of the army from France. Troops to the number of 275,000 will return in April, 250,000 in May, and 300,000 in June, according to the present plans. This last-named monthly rate will be kept up until all of the 1,400,000 men now in France are back in the United States, which should be by September 1 if the above program is maintained. Mr. Baker also said that if any agreement should be reached by which American troops would participate in the defense of the Rhine indefinitely, undoubtedly the only soldiers used would be those who volunteered for such service. He expects to go to Coblenz and the former fighting front with General Pershing, and to return to the United States within ten days. He stated that large quantities of captured guns and other war material would be taken to the United States as trophies.

GRINS AND CHUCKLES

Guest—Are the mosquitoes very fierce around here this summer? Farmer—Naw. They'll come and eat out of your hand.

The Vicar—Now, boys, what animal supplies you with boots and gives you meat to eat? First Boy (promptly)—Father.

Caller—Why do you permit your office boy to smoke cigarettes all the time? Lawyer—Oh, he can't whistle when he is smoking.

Mrs. Newed—Is your husband as affectionate now as when you were first married? Mrs. Oldun—Only when he has been doing something he's ashamed of.

Dorothy—What became of that beautiful man and bashful girl you were telling me about? David—Oh, I introduced them; and in three weeks they were engaged.

"How did you like the new preacher, dear?" asked Mrs. Fijit, when her husband returned from church. "He's great," replied the husband. "He woke me up only once."

Doctor—Did you follow my advice and count until you fell asleep? Patient—I counted up to eighteen thousand. Doctor—And then you fell asleep? Patient—No; then it was time to get up.

For Caller—For goodness sake, what's that noise? Housekeep—Girl next door is having her voice cultivated. Caller—Huh! What are they doing, ploughing it? Housekeep—I don't know, but the sound of it is harrowing.

A FEW GOOD ITEMS

\$54.56 EACH PERSON'S SHARE.

Money circulating in the United States this month is sufficient to give every man, woman and child \$54.56, an increase of 80 cents over the per capita circulation in March, and an increase of \$4.80 over a year ago.

The total amount of money of all kinds available for paying bills is \$5,847,641. The population is estimated to be 107,166,000, an increase of 44,000 since March.

ANCIENT TANNERS.

The ancient Egyptians were skilled in the art of tanning leather, and manufactured it in various ways and for various purposes besides that of furnishing covering for the feet. Indeed, it is to those builders of the pyramids that we are indebted for the first artistic forms of footwear, and so far as can be ascertained from history and the researches of archaeologists, the Egyptians were the first shoemakers who were worthy of the name. It is a fact, too, that tanners of to-day employ very much the same methods as did the ancients. About the same materials are used, and the processes are almost precisely similar to those in vogue hundreds of years ago. It is true that tanners of the present day have found means of greatly shortening the time required to convert a hide into leather, and that steam power and modern machinery have done much to expedite and improve the process of finishing the leather; but, after all, the principles of tanning remain the same as they have been from the first.

ARMY RECRUITING ON THE INCREASE.

Between Feb. 28 and April 17, inclusive, 12,521 men have been enlisted in the Army. The enlistment figures issued by the Statistics Branch, General Staff, show a marked change recently in the number of recruits who prefer the three-year term to the one-year term, although out of the total number enlisted up to April 12, inclusive, the figures stood 5,519 for one-year enlistments and 5,518 for the three-year term. In the period covered by the table, 119 men enlisted for one year, as against fifty-five for the three-year term in the week of March 8. The number of recruits in the three-year column grew steadily and proportionately larger until the week of April 12, when the recruits for the three-year term passed these for the shorter term for the first time. The exact figures for that week are: For one year, 1,704; for three years, 2,696. These figures disprove the general expectation that most men would prefer a short-term enlistment and that a long-term enlistment would prove disadvantageous to the chances for getting recruits.

THE OCTOPUS.

There have been made abroad experiments with an octopus in a specially devised tank of sea water, in order to test the truth of the many stories told of monster cephalopods dragging human victims to the sea-bottom. In the tank with the octopus there was placed a "dummy" of the same specific gravity as a man, and this was baited with a crab. Attracted by this tempting morsel, the octopus made for the figure, seized it in its powerful arms, and tried to drag it under water, without success. It then urged its body toward the edge of the tank; holding the glass with some of its arms, it dragged its prey beneath the surface and crushed the crab-shell with its powerful jaws. It is believed that these experiments afford proof that the octopus can only drag its victims far below the water near rocks to which it can attach its suckers. There is one spot in the Bay of Naples where these creatures attain a large size, and now and then a fisherman is reported missing. It is thought that such disappearances are due to the unfortunate man being caught by the leg by a concealed octopus and dragged under water. In the case of such a repulsive and powerful creature as the octopus, it is difficult to separate fact from fiction.

MOTOR CAR FATAL TO LIONESS.

An exciting encounter between a lioness and a motor car is described by the East African Standard. The affair happened in the outskirts of Nairobi while the driver of a six-cylinder car was making a night journey. He suddenly noted a commotion in the bush beside the pathway, and the next instant, in the uncertain light cast by his lamps, the chauffeur saw the gleaming eyes of a wild animal, which proved to be a lioness. Being unarmed, the motorist accelerated the car, meaning to have a run for his life. But the lioness took a mighty leap and landed right in front of the vehicle.

The car was doing about forty miles an hour, and in a second the collision came. After the impact the heavy car passed safely over the body of the animal. The impetus of the car carried it about fifty yards beyond the spot where the lioness lay growling, and before giving her any chance to recover from the blow, the driver reversed his car and drove straight over her again. This time the growling ceased and the beast lay still. Then the car was driven slowly toward the lioness, and after making sure that she was quite dead, the driver dismounted and vainly tried to load her into the car. Finding that this could not be done without help, he made his way to town, obtained the assistance of two friends and got the animal into the car.

ITEMS OF GENERAL INTEREST

GRAPES KEPT ALL WINTER.

One of the strangest results of the mild winter just passed was brought to light at Elizabeth, Pa., within the last few days, when several bunches of grapes, bagged last summer and never pickled, were opened and found to be in perfect condition and ready to eat. Harvey Ream located the bags hidden away in a thick part of the grape arbor. He declares that the grapes were the finest he ever tasted.

GIRLS SOLD FOR WIVES.

Miss Katherine Wilson, of Dallas, Texas, a missionary to Africa, has written recently to her parents that the missionaries are having a hard time getting enough little African girls together to form a school.

Miss Wilson walked a long distance to another village in an effort to get a few girl children to come to school. The chief told them very politely, but firmly, that all the little girls of his village had been purchased as wives and their fathers had no further jurisdiction over them.

PENNY LINCOLN OWNED.

Mrs. J. L. Underwood, of New Castle, Pa., has a copper cent bearing date 1818, which once

was owned by Abraham Lincoln and was lost by him. She has refused \$250 for it. Mrs. Underwood found the coin while digging in a field near Lincoln City, Ind. She was informed by Joseph Gentry, an old resident, that the penny was one of four or five that Lincoln carried on a string. Lincoln had told Gentry of losing one of the coins. There is a hole in the penny through which the string was run.

A BAFFLED PROFESSOR.

Because a tribe of spiders decided that the glass case that encloses the seismograph in the basement of Blake Hall, at Kansas University, would make an excellent home for their families, the physics professor who cares for the delicate earthquake instrument has been baffled for several days as to why the needles of the seismograph insisted on standing up in the air, instead of resting on the recording drum.

The mystery was solved the other day when Prof. Kester noticed that his arm was covered with spider webs after he had been investigating the situation. He investigated further, and found that several webs attached to the recording needles caused them to stand up.

Boys, Make Money Repairing Leaks.

Mend leaks instantly in all utensils, granite ware, aluminum, tin, brass, hot water bars, etc. No solder, cement or rivet. Any one can use them. Send for sample box, 10c; large box, a. l. sized, 25c, postpaid. Address Charles Unger, Box 15, Hazlet, N. J.

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\$2 to \$500 EACH paid for Hundreds of Coins dated before 1895. Keep ALL old Money. You may have Coins worth a Large Premium. Send 10c. for New Illustrated Coin Value Book, size 4x6. Get Posted at Once.

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This one is a corker! Get a box right away, if you want to have a barrel of joy. Here's the secret: It looks like an ordinary red box of Turkish cigarettes. But it contains a trigger, under which you place a paper cap. Offer your friend a smoke and he raises the lid of the box. That explodes the cap, and if you are wise you will get out of sight with the box before he gets over thinking he was shot. Price 15c, postpaid.

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Can you get the ring off? This puzzle is the latest creation of Yankee ingenuity. Apparently it is the easiest thing in the world to remove the ring from the block, but it takes hours of study to discover the trick unless you know how it is done. Price, by mail, postpaid, 10c; 3 for 25c. H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.

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A handsome Gilt ring set with a brilliant, a close imitation of a diamond. Connected with the ring is a small rubber ball filled with water, which is concealed in the palm of your hand. As your friend is admiring the stone in your ring, a gentle pressure on the ball will throw a small stream of water into his face. The ball can be instantly filled by immersing it in water, when you are ready for your next victim. The ball is entirely hidden in the palm of your hand, and only the ring is seen. Price 25 cents, by mail, postpaid. H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.

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FRANK TOLSEY, Publisher, 168 W. 23d St., New York City.

[illegible]

Stop Snuffling!

Sneezing, hawking, spitting and coughing. Why do you have catarrh anyway? You were not born with catarrh—you contracted it. This offensive, unwholesome, disagreeable complaint fastened itself upon you and grew. Nature in trying to prevent more serious consequences due to the congestion in your body, finds an outlet for the accumulated waste, by way of catarrh. You cannot get rid of it the way you are going—sprays, lotions, snuffing powders, drugs and medicines won't stop it. You know catarrh leads to other troubles—serious ones—throat, lungs, stomach, intestines—all become affected. You can never enjoy good health if you have catarrh; you won't be efficient in anything as long as you have catarrh, and it detracts from your personality to be hawking and snuffing around others.

Build Yourself Up

Be Clean—Wholesome—Healthy—Virile. Go at it the right way—Nature's way; no drugs, no medicines, and you banish catarrh from your system. Let me show you how by my method of health building, body developing, called

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LIONEL STRONGFORT

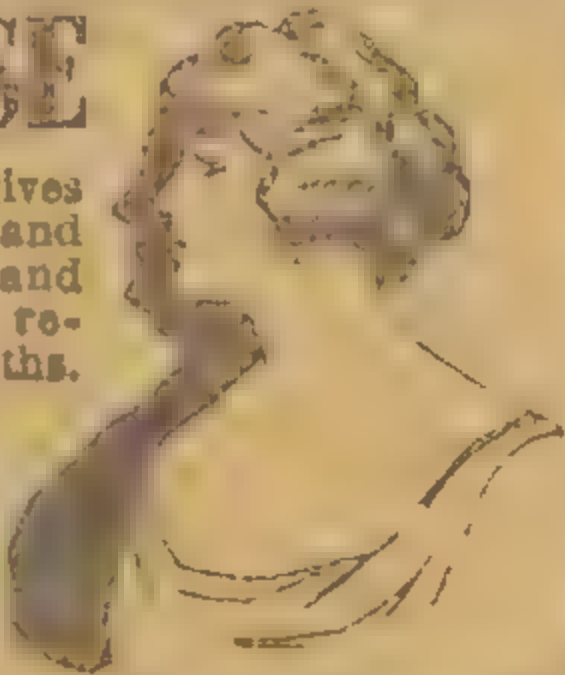
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Some time ago I got one of your Machines and I am very much pleased with it. After working it for about a month I sold it for \$10.00 to a friend of mine. He has it and entertains his family nightly. I have now decided to get another one of your machines. Michael Ehereth, Mandan, N. Dak.

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HERE is what you are to do in order to get the amazing Moving Picture Machine and the real Moving Pictures. Send your name and address—this is all. Write name and address very plainly. Mail to-day. As soon as I receive it I will mail you 20 of the most beautiful premium pictures you ever saw—all brilliant and shimmering colors. These pictures are printed in many colors and among the subjects are such subjects as "The Great Migration," "The American Flag," "Washington at Home," "Battle of Lake Erie," etc. I want you to make sure these pictures are yours on a special 30-cent offer among the people you know. When you have distributed the 20 premium pictures on my special offer you will have collected \$6.00. Send me \$6.00 to me and I will immediately send you FREE the Moving Picture Machine with complete outfit and the Box of Film.

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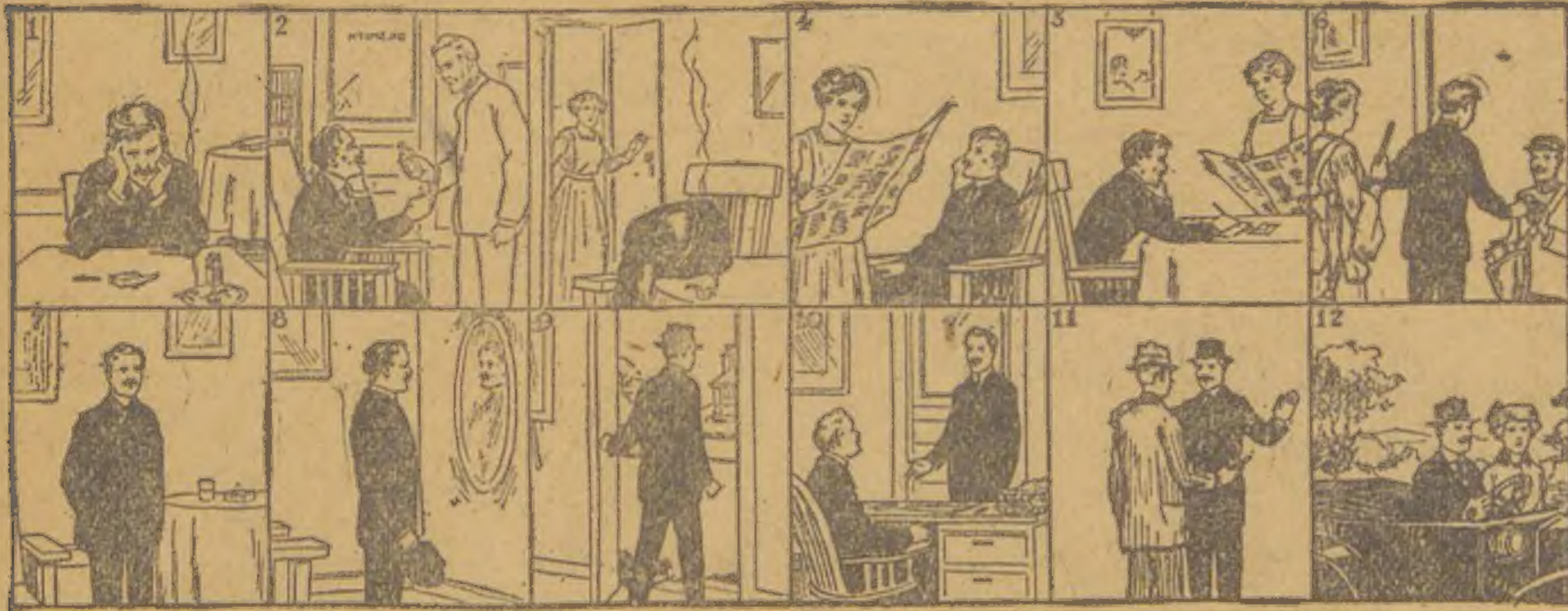
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AFTER



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